

Comités de Tierra Urbana (CTUs) and  
the ‘Right to the City’: Urban Transformation in  
Venezuela’s Bolivarian Revolution

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# Abstract

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The Venezuelan Bolivarian Revolution has provoked researchers to find new ways of engaging with the emergence of popular organizations and movements who are highly mobilized and seeking new forms of popular power and the deepening of democratic practices both within the country and for the Latin American region. This research project argues that at the core of the Bolivarian Revolution is an urban revolution in which barrio residents play a key role in the transformation of the country. Drawing on the work of Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, Neil Smith, Doreen Massey, and Edward Soja, among others, it is argued that a spatial analysis of urban social relations, while usually reserved for the study of capital's role in producing contemporary cities, also allows research to visibilize how popular organizations act as agents in the production and transformation of urban space in their own right.

At the center of this study is the Urban Land Committee movement, which by drawing on what Lefebvre has called 'lived space' knowledges, has evolved from an organization that primarily sought land titles for barrio inhabitants to a national movement that is currently pursuing the 'right to the city', that is, decision-making power over urban space. Through an investigation of the movement's strategies, and with an understanding that these strategies are inherently spatial in nature, it is possible to ask how the movement is transforming urban space in Venezuela. Ultimately, the work of the Urban Land Committee movement has implications both for theories about the production of urban space and for the construction of popular power in the Bolivarian Revolution.

## Acknowledgments

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While I began this project desiring to know more and think better about the social problems that I care about, I could never have anticipated the kind of deep impact the experience would have on me and the kind of personal lessons that I would learn along the way. Certainly these lessons would have been less enjoyable and less profound if not for the people who I met and who supported me along the way. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to work with other scholars at the University of Nottingham, the School of Politics and International Relations, and the Centre for the Study of Social and Global Justice. Thanks to Simon Tormey for helping to create a Centre where people like me could feel at home and inspired and to Andreas Bieler for opening the door to a post-graduate degree that I had never imagined for myself. Thanks to the School of Politics, the Centre, and the Graduate School for providing the funding that was necessary to allow the research to happen.

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## Frequently Used Terms and Abbreviations

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AD	Acción Democrática/Democratic Action Party
ALBA-TCP	Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América-Tratado de Comercio de los Pueblos/Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America-Treaty of Commerce
Barrio	Shantytown, areas of the city largely identified by lack of legal tenancy and/or housing constructed its very inhabitants and/or precarious conditions and limited access to urban services
Carta del Barrio	Barrio Charter
CMS	Consejo de Movimientos Sociales/Council of Social Movements
COPEI	Comité de Organización Político Electoral Independiente/ Independent Electoral Political Organization Committee
CPTH	Centros de Participación para la Transformación del Hábitat/Centers of Participation for the Transformation of Habitat
CTU	Comités de Tierra Urbana/Urban Land Committees
CTV	Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela/Confederation of Venezuelan Workers
Encuentro	Meeting, encounter
INAVI	Instituto Nacional de la Vivienda/National Institute for Housing
Levantamiento	Survey, Uprising, Start-up
MST	Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra/Landless Workers' Movement (Brazil)
OTN	Oficina Técnica Nacional para la Regularización de la Tenencia de la Tierra Urbana/ National Technical Office for the Regularization of Urban Land Tenancy
Parroquia	District within a city
PCV	Partido Comunista de Venezuela/Venezuelan Community Party
PBNT	Plan Barrio Nuevo Tricolor
Pobladores	Shantytown dwellers or urban inhabitants
Poligonal	Geographical area of a CTU
Rancho	Self-built houses made of metal and wood
Regularization	Land titling process
SELVIP	Secretaría Latinoamericana de Vivienda Popular/Latin American Secretariat for Popular Housing
URD	Unión Republicana Democrática/Democratic Republican Union

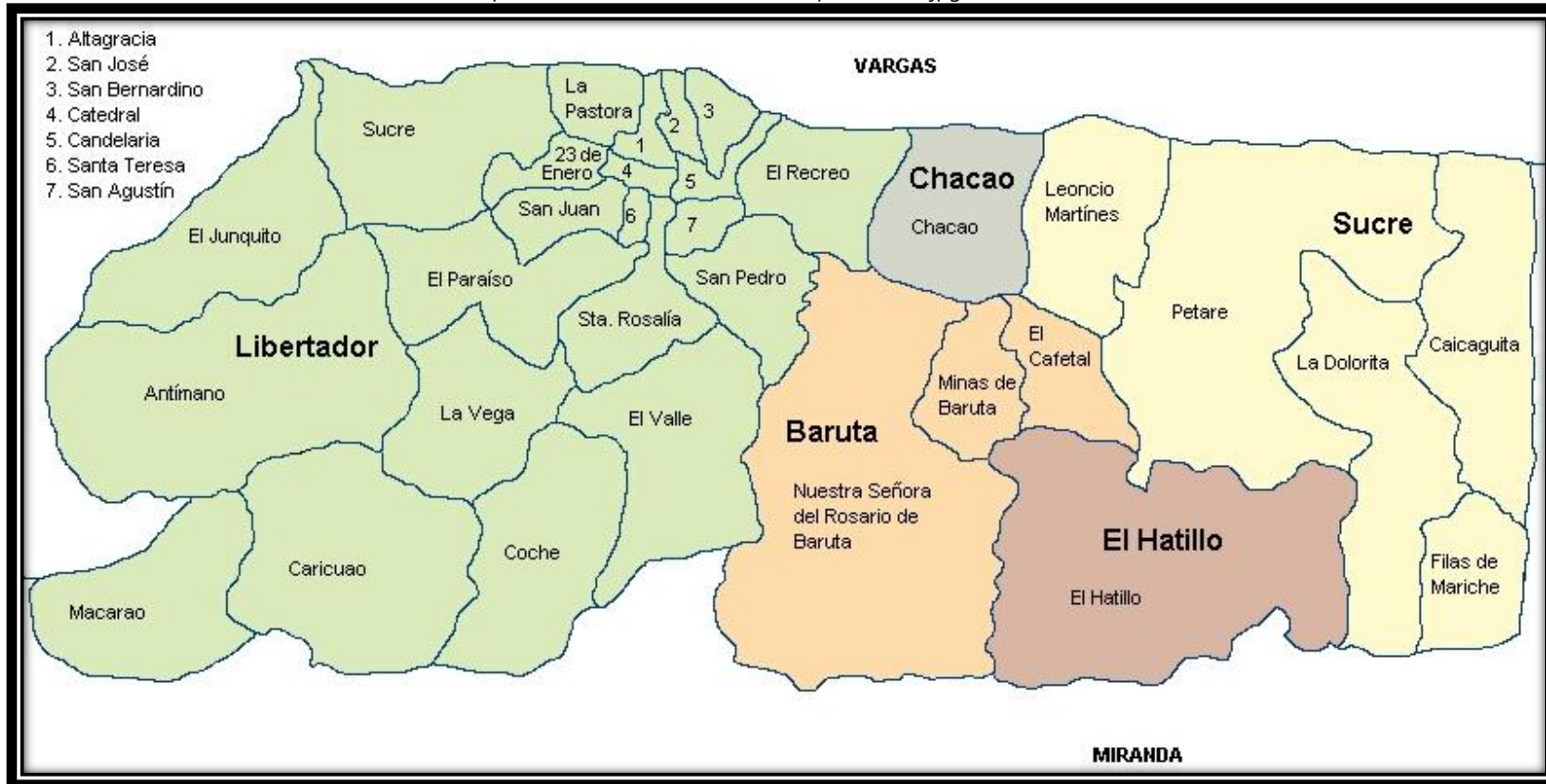
## Map 1: Venezuela

Source: <http://www.smarttraveller.gov.au/zwiki/images/regions/maps/jpeg/Venezuela.jpg>, Retrieved 7 June 2011



## Map 2: Metropolitan Area of Caracas

Source: <http://www.inmuebles.com/otros/mapas/caracas.jpg>, Retrieved 7 June 2011



The Metropolitan Area of Caracas consists of five municipalities (Libertador, Chacao, Baruta, Sucre and El Hatillo) that span two states (the Capital District and Miranda). Each municipality has its own mayor. The Metropolitan Area is governed by a regional mayor who is responsible for Metropolitan-wide issues, such as the Metro. The Libertador District is further divided into 22 *parroquias*. The majority of barrios are located in southwest Libertador, though Petare in Sucre is considered one of the largest single barrio areas in Latin America. The overlapping governance structures within the Metropolitan Area of Caracas (*parroquia*, municipal, metropolitan area, state and national) make the struggle over Caracas unique and complex, but also reflective of national trends.



Map 3: Aerial View of Libertador District, Caracas



# Chapter 1

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## INTRODUCTION

*There are many Urban Land Committees that think that they are set up in order to get land titles. But no, that isn't the idea. You can't just leave with the land title. You need to make things better.*

Rosa, Urban Land Committee Activist, Caracas,  
personal interview, 9 May 2010

*We call upon all the popular organizations that fight for just living conditions in the city, the socialization of urban land, the recuperation of idle spaces, the transformation of our barrios,<sup>1</sup> the right to dignified housing and habitat, the social and self-managed production of habitat, against arbitrary evictions, the regulation of the housing market, to those excluded and exploited by capitalism... we call upon you to advance in the constitution of a powerful popular movement that is capable, along with our commander the President, of conducting the URBAN REVOLUTION.*

Manifesto for the Urban Revolution, The Pobladores Movement,  
Caracas, November 2010<sup>2</sup>

On the evening of April 8, 2010, I arrived at the entrance of a sugar processing factory operated by a worker-owned cooperative in the quiet, dusty town of Tocuyo near Barquisimeto in north-west Venezuela. The factory, closed for the night, along with several one-room temporary housing facilities, could be found at the end of a dirt road leading out of town. Across the road was a small, grassy slope atop of which sits the local community center (see Photo 8, p. 203) where activists from the *Comités de Tierra Urbana* (CTU, Urban

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<sup>1</sup> The word *barrio* in Spanish generally means 'neighborhood'. However, as one Venezuelan remarked, even language is divided by class. In Venezuela, *barrio* indicates the shantytown communities, while *urbanización* generally indicates middle-class and wealthy neighborhoods (unless otherwise specified). Other Latin American countries have different names for their shantytown areas: Argentina's *villas miserias*, Brazil's *favelas*, or Mexico's *ciudades perdidas*.

<sup>2</sup> All translations are the author's own unless otherwise noted.

Land Committees) were beginning to gather for their Fourth National *Encuentro*. The *encuentro*<sup>3</sup> was a four-day bi-annual conference to discuss the problems, successes, plans and proposals of the Urban Land Committee Movement. In 2010, more than 100 activists from across Venezuela participated in this meeting.

As I entered the community center that would serve the dual purpose of a meeting room and a sleeping area for the *encuentro*, I quickly spotted members of the *Equipo de Formación* (Training Team), the team of barrio activists who had planned the event and would facilitate the discussions. Some were organizing packets of information for each of the participants; others were huddled over large pieces of butcher paper preparing the final agenda for the collective debates that would begin the next morning. The Training Team is a voluntary group<sup>4</sup> of CTU activists who are tasked with the work of organizing and facilitating national and local meetings of the CTUs. In practice, the team also serves as a central conduit of information and organization at all scales of the movement's activities. With its intense level of activity and its tendency to meet in Caracas,<sup>5</sup> the Training Team became a key point of entry for me in my 3-year investigation of the CTUs as a national movement. The relationship I built with the team as a whole, and with its individual members who come from across the country, allowed me to participate in many of the movement's day-to-day activities, as well as large events, such as the National *Encuentro*.

Arrival at the National *Encuentro* marked the beginning of my third trip to Venezuela in as

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<sup>3</sup> In Spanish the word *encuentro*, in the way that it is used in this chapter, can be translated to mean 'meeting.' However, the root word *encontrar* can also mean 'to encounter (another).' It is this second connotation that is important to keep in mind in reference to the CTU activities, and therefore, I use the term *encuentro* whenever it is used in actual practice.

<sup>4</sup> The team is formally comprised of as many as 60 participants, but only about 15-20 are active at the national scale at a given period of time.

<sup>5</sup> As explained on page x, 'Caracas' can refer to various geographies, particularly either the Libertador District or the Metropolitan Area of Caracas. In this work I use the term Caracas to mean the Metropolitan Area of Caracas.

many years. During that time I followed the work of the CTU movement as it attempted to gain land titles for barrio residents and united with other popular<sup>6</sup> movements to transform urban geographies and governance in Venezuela. Since the CTUs were created in 2002, the movement has articulated its struggle in various ways – as ‘democratization of the city’, the ‘right to the city’, and the ‘urban revolution’ (as noted in the epigraph of this chapter) – each of which reflect the evolving politics of the movement. My own interest is in understanding how this politics, and the various strategies that it implies, are transforming urban space.<sup>7</sup> Thus the primary question that drives this research project is how have the CTU strategies to construct popular power transformed urban space in Venezuela?

The National *Encuentro* also marked an important moment in the life of the CTU movement. Many of the tensions that had been rising within the movement for several years – the complex relationship with the state and the perceived lack of institutional response to the movement’s proposals, the impact of uneven geographies<sup>8</sup> for a national movement that is spread over thousands of localities, the lack of financial resources and subsequent pressure on already-dispossessed people, and the question of how to evolve the movement – seemed to come to a head in the early part of 2010. At that moment, the most predominant difficulties were questions about the relationship with the state and the integration of the movement into what is now called the *Movimiento de Pobladores y Pobladoras* (Settlers’

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<sup>6</sup> The term ‘popular’ in Spanish refers to the dispossessed, poor majority. In a discussion of ‘popular’ culture, Stuart Hall (2002/1981: 189) warns us that the use of ‘popular’ does not suggest a pure subject, and while popular refers to those classes that are in tension with the ‘dominant’, both are mutually constituted through struggle and thus ‘composed of antagonistic and unstable elements’ (see also Massey 1984: 32-8). Keeping this in mind, I have chosen to use this term for several reasons: to explicitly identify the kinds of movements that are the focus of this work; to draw the connection between movements and the construction of popular power (see below); and to avoid using the term ‘social movement’ which invokes an entrenched area of research from North America and Western Europe that tends to use the global North as a reference point (Slater 1994: 20) and which I believe cannot adequately engage with the political practices, ideologies, and impact of Latin American popular movements.

<sup>7</sup> The term ‘urban space’ has a particular meaning that will be discussed in Chapter 2.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Uneven geographies’ has a particular meaning that will be discussed in Chapter 2.

Movement, from here the Pobladores Movement), an alliance between various urban popular movements who are calling for 'the right to the city', which includes but is not limited to barrio-specific concerns.<sup>9</sup> As one activist told me,

The [CTU] movement had arrived at a point of rupture. That's why we had to do the *encuentro* no matter what happened. We had to decide whether we are a movement or not. The *encuentro* served for that: yes we are a movement. Do we recognize other organizations? Yes, we recognize them... so that the movement has strength. The CTUs by themselves are weak (Ricardo, CTU activist, Caracas, personal interview, 15 April 2010).

Seven months after the National *Encuentro*, Venezuela experienced the worst flooding and landslides since 1999, leaving more than 130,000 people homeless with little choice but to seek temporary shelter in schools, hotels and abandoned buildings, or to squat on empty urban plots ('El Gobierno de Venezuela' 2010). With such an emergency to deal with, President Chávez asked to meet with the CTUs in January 2011 and announced the creation of the Great Housing Mission (personal communications with movement activists, January 2011), a mission that was started in 2004 but then essentially abandoned (García-Guadilla 2006: 10). Then, on 5 May 2011, President Chávez approved several housing projects and

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<sup>9</sup> Several points should be noted here. First, the term 'Movimiento de Pobladores' has been debated since around 2004 but was used to refer to the CTUs (CTU 2004). However, the term has been taken up in regular movement communications since 2010 and has come to include a wider coalition of popular organizations. Second, the term originated from the experience of Caracas-based CTUs (Fernando, CTU activist, Caracas, personal conversation, CTU National Encuentro, 8 April 2010; Cristóbal, CTU activist, Caracas, CTU National Liaisons meeting, 22 May 2010) and as such has been a significant point of contention between Caracas and other localities, some of whom only identify as CTU. This situation exemplifies the role that place plays in the construction of the movement, a theme that will be discussed in Chapters 2, 4, 5 and 6. Finally, the full name – Movimiento de Pobladores y Pobladoras – reflects the growing awareness of gender within the movement and throughout Venezuela. While in Spanish the masculine version of a word is customarily used when referring to mix-gendered groups, Venezuelans are frequently using the masculine and feminine words together. For legibility I will only use the word 'pobladores', however, elsewhere I have followed the gender-conscious approach.



signed three housing-related laws, including the Reform of the Urban Land Regularization Law for which the CTU movement has been fighting since 2007. With a deficit of more than two million homes across the country and in the face of continued flooding, housing is being publicly declared a priority of the Chávez government. Within this new political climate, the national CTU movement is gaining renewed life within the articulation of the Pobladores Movement (personal communication, 15 May 2011),<sup>10</sup> which is now comprised of the CTUs, the [Caracas] Metropolitan Network of Renters, the Pioneer Camps, the United Custodians of Venezuela, Barrio Youth, and Popular Housing Committees. Each of these organizations is comprised of urban inhabitants who experience distinct housing conditions (self-built, overcrowded, apartments), live in different parts of the city (periphery or city center) and have assorted immediate needs (land title, new housing, labor rights, or protection against eviction). Though fighting for distinct policy interests, most of these groups trace their origination to the CTU movement, and together they are seeking to transform the whole of the city.

Despite the seeming advances on the issue of housing (e.g. the government has committed itself to building 153,000 new units of housing in 2011 and two million over the next seven years ['Chávez lanza plan' 2011]), the CTU Movement continues to face the challenge of transforming power relations within cities and producing urban space that is based on popular power practices. As Rosa explains in the epitaph above, for the movement, this suggests something more than just housing or land titles. Rather, it is the collective construction of a politics to transform what is often referred to as the urban 'habitat',<sup>11</sup> that is, the whole of urban living, which includes the cultural realm (Maria, personal interview, 14

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<sup>10</sup> This is also evidenced by the renewal of monthly national meetings and by the fact that in weekly meetings, internal correspondence, and public pronouncements the CTUs now identify themselves as the Movimiento de Pobladores y Pobladoras.

<sup>11</sup> The word 'habitat' is used to express either the living environment of the barrios or the urban life more broadly. It is this second meaning that Lefebvre (2003/1970) suggests is a more radical position.

May 2010).

In this respect, how the movement is constructing this political position, the struggles of the movement to transform the urban, and the contradictions it experiences also lend insight into the larger context of the Venezuelan Bolivarian Revolution in which the movement is situated. This is so precisely because the movement's political practices reveal historical socio-spatial relations that continue to inform how popular power is constructed, and they illuminate the precarious 'dance' that popular organizations must do with the state (Dangl 2010).

This is no doubt a significant moment in the history of Venezuela. Under the leadership of President Hugo Chávez, the Bolivarian Revolution has begun a process towards what many are calling 'Twenty-First Century Socialism', a process that proposes to produce an alternative economic and political model to global neoliberal capitalism and United States imperialism.<sup>12</sup> A central feature of this revolutionary process is the role of popular actors in the remaking of the country. The Bolivarian Revolution has given rise to a deep sense of agency among popular sectors, especially barrio-dwellers, and a sense that they are in the midst of creating revolutionary history that is both local and global in nature. As such, CTU activists and those from other popular movements are engaged in multiple layers of struggle: the construction of new subjectivities rooted in the concept of popular power; the theoretical and practical debate surrounding the role of popular power and its relationship to the state in the pursuit of Twenty-First Century Socialism; and the stimulation of an urban

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<sup>12</sup> The extent to which this is realizing such a project is an active point of discussion both in the academy and in Venezuela's streets but not one that will be taken up here. As Victor Figueroa (2006: 199) notes, 'the character of the process being led by Chávez is not anti-capitalist or strictly speaking, even anti-imperialist. Rather, it is a process seeking to combat economic and social exclusion while opening the way to an inclusive democracy... [However], it has definitely generated expectations that a new point of departure has been established...'

revolution that is connected to global resistance to neoliberal capitalism. These struggles, as well as historical experiences of popular organization in Venezuela, animate much of the activity of the CTU Movement, informing how it organizes itself, the political strategies that are utilized, and how it conceptualizes urban transformation.

The purpose of this chapter is to give a contextual overview of both the research project and the Urban Land Committees. The rest of the chapter is broken up into two halves. The first half discusses the research questions, the academic contributions that this project hopes to make, and the methods and methodology employed in the research and writing process. The second half starts with a brief summary of who the Urban Land Committees are, after which I will explain the recent emergence of the left(s) in Latin America and the specific development of the Venezuelan Bolivarian Revolution. Underpinning this regional and national narrative is an emphasis on the role that popular organizations are playing and the practices they are engaged in, which has led several researchers to suggest that what we are seeing in Latin America is a new form of popular power. Making specific reference to the geographic implications of popular power practices, the chapter will then discuss the significance of urban-based popular mobilization both in terms of the growing urban barrio population across the globe and in terms of academic analysis of urban transformation and the right to the city. The chapter will end with a brief summary of the chapters to follow.

## **THE RESEARCH PROJECT: AN OVERVIEW**

This research project is a theoretically-informed, empirically-driven (Lichterman 2002) study that situates itself at the point of mutual constitution between the political practices of the CTU movement and the transformation of urban space within the Bolivarian Revolution.

While recognizing that the Pobladores Movement is quickly becoming the nationally articulated identity of the CTU movement, this research project places greater emphasis on the history and strategies of the CTUs, which have served as the basis from which these other urban popular organizations have emerged.<sup>13</sup> As such, the central research questions are: how have the CTU strategies to construct popular power transformed urban space in Venezuela? What strategies are employed? What limits and opportunities does the construction of popular power face?

Theoretically, I draw on recent theories that recognize the spatiality of social relations, including work by Doreen Massey, Neil Smith, David Harvey, and Edward Soja. In particular, I make use of Henri Lefebvre's (1991/1974) idea of 'the production of space', in order to reveal the connection between the construction of popular power and the transformation of urban space in contemporary Venezuela. Lefebvre's contribution allows us to recognize that social relations and space exist in a mutually constituting relationship; not only that, but Lefebvre argues that different kinds of space – space oriented toward domination and space that inspires revolution – though not delimited from one another, are produced by different kinds of social relations and knowledges. These knowledges range from technocratic knowledge that seeks to abstract, homogenize, and massify human experience to knowledge that is only ever able to be fully known through lived experience, making it diverse and 'illegible' (Scott 1998) to those who seek to dominate it.

It is through this socio-spatial relations/knowledge formulation that we can examine how popular agents are shaped and limited by the space in which they are located and how they

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<sup>13</sup> With that said, it is difficult to distinguish where the CTU movement ends and the Pobladores Movement begins. Even as early as 2006 some of the popular organizations that now form part of the Pobladores Movement participated in the CTU National *Encuentro*. Wherever necessary I indicate how and when these organizations have articulated with the CTUs and emulate the self-identification of the CTU movement and its participants.

can, in turn, shape that space. This is an important point if we are to take seriously the work of urban popular struggles and the role they play in the Bolivarian Revolution specifically, as well as the production of cities more generally. Following Arturo Escobar's (2001: 166-7) argument, amidst the 'gestalt of space' that has taken over the social sciences in recent years, popular movements suggest that the production of space 'be approached not only from the perspective of capital's spatialization' but also from the side of 'place-based networks', or territorial-based movements, such as the CTUs.

As such, this research places itself among a growing cohort of academics (see for example Fernandes, S. 2007, 2010a, 2010b; Ramírez 2005; Motta 2009, 2011a, 2011b; Duno-Gottberg 2011; Muhr forthcoming) from distinct disciplines and theoretical orientations who are using ethnographic methods to more deeply understand the complex processes of social transformation in Venezuela and its significance for the region. Alongside these researchers, this project gives special consideration to the role of popular actors within the Bolivarian Revolution and their political struggle for popular power.<sup>14</sup> Hence, this work contributes to the debates about the changing interests and strategies of Latin American popular movements (Veltmeyer 1998; Assies 1999; Vanden 2003; Harris 2007; Karriem 2009; Motta 2009), their relationship with left-leaning governments (de Souza 2006; Petras & Veltmeyer 2006; Dangl 2010), the alternative models of development that they express (Escobar 2004), and increasing recognition of territorial politics as a progressive strategy for social transformation (Slater 1994; Escobar 2001; Chatterton 2005; Fernandes, 2010a; Stahler-Sholk & Vanden 2011).

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<sup>14</sup> In some instances, it is actually non-academics who best capture the nuances of this struggle. Two recently published works stand out as examples of this: *Venezuela Speaks!* (Martínez, et al 2010), a volume of 18 transcribed interviews with activists from popular organizations, and *Dancing with Dynamite* (Dangl 2010), a regional study of the relationship between popular movements and their respective governments.

Finally, literature over the past several decades suggests that the urban is a key site of struggle in the global political economy (Lefebvre 2003/1970; Harvey 1973; Smith 2003; Lake 2006; Sassen 2006; Nicholls 2008). The urban plays an equally important role in Latin America at a regional scale and its transformation is central to the Bolivarian Revolution – even to the extent that the Bolivarian Revolution is essentially an *urban* revolution. Within this worldwide struggle, popular actors (e.g. barrio-dwellers) are key, if under-theorized, political agents who are beginning to demand the ‘right to the city’.<sup>15</sup> On this front, the CTUs are a movement that is evolving its own understanding of the right to the city, at times using this concept interchangeably with ‘democratization of the city’. By locating the CTU movement in a larger debate about global urbanization and the role of social movements within urban politics, this project also contributes to nascent research about ‘right to the city’ struggles across the globe (see Isin 2000; Purcell 2002, 2003; Mitchell 2003; Harvey 2008; Soja 2010). Thus, from a spatially specific location in the urban barrios of Caracas, what Lefebvre (1991/1974: 87-8) refers to as a ‘punctual space’, this project speaks to greater concerns about the role that popular agents can play in the transformation of urban space in other parts of the world, the strategies they might use, and the lessons we can glean from the Venezuelan experience.

## **METHODS AND METHODOLOGY**

In order to best understand the relationship between the construction of popular power and the transformation of urban space, I chose to use participant-observation as my primary research method. I was interested in following the evolution of the movement and changing

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<sup>15</sup> The term ‘right to the city’ was coined by Lefebvre in his work *Le droite a la ville* (1968), later translated by Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas and published in *Writings on the City* (1996).

urban space over time, so I undertook three fieldwork trips to Venezuela during the period of June 2008 to June 2010, for a total of seven months. One month was spent becoming acquainted with Caracas and a variety of activists in the Bolivarian Revolution, most of whom live and/or work in the barrios. The next six months were spent in intensive participant-observation with the CTU movement, where I attended their regular meetings at the local (barrio), regional (Metropolitan Area of Caracas), and national (Venezuela) scales. In addition, I participated in marches, meetings with state institutions, workshops, debates, a national *encuentro*, and a two-week school for *poblador* activists.

Participant-observation and field notes were complimented by over 35 semi-structured, formal interviews with movement activists, barrio residents, academics and government officials (Blee & Taylor 2002; see Appendix A, p. 291). My research also involved dozens of informal interviews, more than 35 hours of film that I was permitted to take of movement meetings and activities, archival research for historical information about the barrios, and government documents about national urban growth and urban land legislation. Most formal interviews with CTU activists were conducted in the final two months of fieldwork in order to uncover the subjective experiences of the movement and to probe more deeply into the contradictions and tensions that the movement has experienced in the Bolivarian Revolution. The interviews and parts of the film have been transcribed, translated and codified into themes, such as knowledge production practices, state-movement relations, popular power principles, Caracas history, and changing popular subjectivities. In addition, the movement has produced many of its own documents and videos at various scales of articulation, including collectively produced documents at the national scale, on which I also rely in order to understand the political evolution of the movement and its public position regarding the state. Finally, apart from my fieldwork trips, I have had ongoing contact with

several activists in the movement since 2009.

This is not an ethnography in the sense of 'thick description' of a (perceived) 'bounded site' (Davies 2009: 25), represented by the work of Lisa Peattie (1970), nor is the text driven by the re-narration of interviews, such as that which has been beautifully done by Judith Alder Hellman (1994, 2008). Rather, I am employing Doreen Massey's idea of place to guide the research and writing process.<sup>16</sup> Massey (1994: 5) argues that place is 'a particular moment in those networks of social relations and understandings' which 'includes relations which stretch beyond – the global as part of what constitutes the local, the outside as part of the inside.' What this means is that place is 'constructed not by placing boundaries around it and defining its identity through counter-position to the other which lies beyond, but precisely (in part) through the specificity of the mix of links and interconnections to that "beyond". Places viewed this way are open and porous.' So, while the CTU movement self-describes as a 'territorial movement', this territory does not imply a highly localized, bounded place but involves multiple scales of intersecting social relations, place and space. This concept of place is used to inform both my theoretical framework, which will be discussed in Chapter 2, and my fieldwork approach.

Zsuzsa Gille (2001: 324) explains the significance of Massey's idea of place on the process of ethnographic fieldwork and research:

First of all, if sites are not static and if their uniqueness lies not in some essential identity but in the particular intersection of social relations (local and extralocal), then history must be a part of global ethnography. Second,

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<sup>16</sup> The connection between my theoretical framework and methodological orientation was realized when I read the work of Zsuzsa Gille (2001).



if places should not be seen as homogeneous and strictly sealed off from the outside, then extending the fieldwork to several sites, dictated not by the logic of the ethnographer, as in Marcus (1998), but by these social relations, is necessary. Third, if places are abundant with social relations and their links to other places are also social relations, then fieldwork must study not merely in the chosen sites but must study and account for changes in the relations between them.

Thus, 'if we are to think relationally about space' – as I am trying to do – 'it necessarily implies an opening up and unfolding of ethnography' (Davies 2009: 25). As Davies (ibid.) suggests, 'we should instead move towards the limits of ethnography by exploring how place and space shape the wider political environment' (see also Hart 2006: 994-6).

Such an orientation to the site of research has had at least two distinct effects on this research project. The first is implicit in the research questions that drive the project where the social relations of a place (the *barrio*) are investigated for their impact on wider socio-spatial scales (the urban). Second, the idea of place has also shaped how I went about doing fieldwork: I followed the work of the CTU movement through the different urban spaces that it attempts to 'appropriate' (Lefebvre 1996/1968, see below), including individual homes, local *barrios*, city centers and state institutions. In this sense, there was a single site of research (the CTU/Pobladores Movement) that moved through different places (see also Hage 2005).

In addition to this physical (and imagined) movement, something more should be said about my spatial position as a researcher in Venezuela which significantly affects the

viewpoint through which I understand the Bolivarian Revolution and the 'urban revolution'. Just as the particular historical geographies shape the forms of struggle that popular movements adopt (Escobar 2001; Hart 2002; Ulrich 2004) so too do they play a part in shaping research. The majority of my fieldwork time centered on the Metropolitan Area of Caracas, where the CTUs were first born and where a significant number of CTUs (more than 1700) are located. Caracas also served as a 'strategically located research site' (Gerson & Horowitz 2002: 201) for my study of urban transformation. Many of the national CTU activities are coordinated and/or held in the capital, and all of the national institutions regarding urban land reform are located there.<sup>17</sup> Because Caracas serves as a meeting point and a conduit for movement activities, my residence there allowed me to meet and interview activists from around the country.

During six of my seven months in Venezuela, I lived in a community house run by a group of barrio women located at the base of a barrio-covered hillside in *parroquia* Antimano, in southwest Caracas (see Map 3, p. xii). In the seventh month I lived in a 3-bedroom, rented apartment with an activist from the Metropolitan Network of Renters (part of the Pobladores Movement), along with his wife, son, pregnant daughter-in-law, mother-in-law, and grandchild. I also travelled to other parts of Venezuela to participate in CTU events or to interview CTU activists. However, most of these activities also took place in barrios. Only on a few rare occasions did I spend time in the eastern side of Caracas, where the middle- and upper-class neighborhoods are located.

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<sup>17</sup> These geographic realities have produced distinct histories and uneven social relations within the movement itself, which will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. For more on the significance of Caracas as a primate city in Venezuela, see below and Chapter 3.

**Photo 1: Barrios of Caracas**



View from metro station of author's barrio of residence. Photo by author.

The spatial segregation between upper-class neighborhoods and barrios is not insignificant, in geographic, socio-economic or cultural terms.<sup>18</sup> In terms of distance, in Caracas it might take a *pobladora* two hours to travel from a hilltop barrio to the center of the city, using various modes of public transportation, such as four-wheel-drive jeeps, mini-buses, and the metro. The physical distance is compounded by the steepness of the terrain, long queues waiting to catch the buses, and heavy traffic (usually the barrios only have one or two entrance- and exit-points). This physical distance is combined with a social distance. For instance, no middle- and upper-class person that I came into contact with had ever gotten off the metro near the neighborhood where I was living, let alone climbed the steep stairs to the barrios there. They were often shocked or dismayed at where I was living. This anecdotal

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<sup>18</sup> This will be discussed more in Chapter 3

experience is reinforced by Venezuelan sociologist Pedro Trigo (2004: 36-7) who describes upper-class views of the barrios of Caracas as ranging from beliefs that they are peasants and should return to the farm (*el campo*) to a belief that they are a 'red zone, cancer and sewer of the city.' In short, these areas are perceived by many 'outsiders' to be dirty, chaotic and dangerous (and sometimes are). As a result, most of my interactions (except for several interviews with public officials, the few friends I made from the local universities, or the handful of foreigners like myself) were with barrio-dwellers either in their homes, in their communities, their place of work, or in weekly meetings that were held in the city center (see Map 3, p. xii).

The intentional choice of grounding my fieldwork in the barrios also speaks to methodological concerns that guide this research. I am concerned about the political and ethical nature of the research and my relationship with the research subject (see Mato 2000). Specifically, as Barker and Cox (2001: 6) put it, I intend to contribute 'to changing the unjust and violent society which we have inherited, so that together we [can] initiate the necessary transformation.' My attempt to address these concerns by embracing a political orientation of solidarity and critique with the CTU movement has been inspired by the idea of 'movement-relevant research' (Bevington & Dixon 2005). That is, research which addresses the *particular questions* of the movement and produces its findings through a *dialogical relationship* with the movement. This involves putting the thoughts and concerns of the movement participants at the center of the research agenda and showing a commitment to producing accurate and potentially useful information about the issues that are important to these groups (ibid.: 200). Similarly, Johnston and Goodman (2006: 10-11) call for research that takes on 'issues of public relevance to communities in the Global South' and challenges 'the defeatist tone of neo-liberal orthodoxy.'

It is perhaps useful to juxtapose the idea of movement-relevant research methodologies with a more common ethnographic methodology that also explicitly recognizes that social science is already engaged in the 'the political', either by reproducing dominant forms of knowledge and practice, silencing voices, or prioritizing some views of the world over others (Burawoy 2000: 27). This approach is the 'Extended Case Method', best recognized and pioneered in the work of Michael Burawoy (1998, 2000) and his students. The Extended Case Method also emphasizes the importance of dialogue and has become popular among those working with popular movements. Burawoy's research process 'starts out from dialogue, virtual or real, between observer and participants, embeds such dialogue within a second dialogue between local processes and extralocal forces that in turn can only be comprehended through a third, expanding dialogue of theory with itself' (Burawoy 1998: 5).<sup>19</sup> With an interest in gaining 'insight into the lived experience of globalization (Burawoy 2000: 4), Burawoy is interested in 'extending' this real and imagined dialogue (ibid.: 27) further and further out from a specific place in order to see how 'the part is shaped by its relation to the whole' (ibid.: 28). The end result of the work, he suggests, should be an 'extension of theory' which is accomplished through a 'dialogue with other theorists as well as with the world we encounter as ethnographers' (ibid.).

To begin with, the idea of extending the scales of dialogue from a specific place is helpful in maintaining the popular movements and their questions at the center of the research process, even as one investigates the wider context, such as urban space or globalization, in which movements struggle. The extension of theory – rather than its rote application – based on this situatedness is significant to bridging the gap between the institution of

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<sup>19</sup> In *Global Ethnography* (2000) Burawoy describes the Extended Case Method as having four steps. The missing step is the second: 'extending observations over time and space' (ibid.: 27). In this work, he also takes up the issue of power, linking different moments of the method to different forms of power (ibid.: 26-8).

academia and movement work (see below). Similarly, the search for relevancy is also motivated by an interest to improve theory.

While Burawoy's methodology might provide insight into the production of movement-relevant theory, it is also problematic in as much as the end goal of the Extended Case Method is the *improvement of theory*. Burawoy's focus on improving theory means that he neglects continuous dialogue that is possible at all scales (his process is linear) and stops the dialogue at the moment of theory production, reifying the division between theory and practice. Instead, a movement-relevant approach might take to heart Raymond Williams's work that, in the words of David Harvey (1996: 25, emphasis added), 'charts a terrain of theoretical possibilities in which *the reduction of relations between people into relations between concepts*' can (and should) *be continuously challenged*. That is to say, social relations and the ideas about these relations should be held together in constant tension, producing an ongoing dialogue that does not end at 'theory with itself'.

Noticeably, then, Burawoy's method is based on analytical dichotomies – observer/participant, local/global, theory/practice which, as will be discussed in a moment, contributes to the epistemological exclusion of barrio dwellers in academia and politics, which is a central concern of this thesis. In other words, the Extended Case Method stretches the boundaries of ethnographic practice but does not go far enough to disrupt dominant forms of knowledge an essential component to practicing relevancy in the way that I am interpreting the word.

In the case of this research project, I am interested in relevancy on two fronts. The first is to understand how popular groups contribute to our theoretical understanding of what

constitutes and/or produces urban transformation. In other words, I am interested in understanding barrio inhabitants as germane to the production of urban space, an area of theoretical consideration that has been largely neglected. This objective might fall into the Burawoy's final 'moment' of knowledge production. The second interest here, however, is to make the research process and written outcome useful/relevant to the CTU movement as a tool for critical reflection about themselves and their situation, or possibly useful to the practice of other movements. Both instances require an orientation towards solidarity and mutual learning, which attempts to disrupt the dichotomies discussed above.

As Massey (2000) has noted, preoccupation with research relevancy abounds (see also Fals Borda 1985; Mato 2000; Staelheli & Mitchell 2005; Routledge 2006; Mathers & Novelli 2007; Chatterton et al 2010). Despite best intentions, however, even the search for relevancy is fraught with difficulties. My own and others' experiences (see Mato 2000; Chatterton et al 2010), suggest that there are various obstacles and hidden assumptions to realizing this interest.<sup>20</sup> As a PhD student, the first and most obvious is the constraints presented by the institutionally-sanctioned process of research (Kalra 2006) in which certain expectations must be met within a certain timeframe. Of course, the institutional constraints become even more significant once one becomes part of the division of labor within higher education. Barker & Cox (2001) describe the struggle for relevancy as a struggle over the 'social context' of the academic: the physical location (traditionally at a desk in a building, far from the subject of study), the demands of the institution (teach, publish, administrate), and the orientation the researcher has towards herself and her subject of study. Research from this social context risks 'the detached academic study of social movements [which] can be self-

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<sup>20</sup> For some this type of approach raises a host of questions, not the least of which is whether or not academic research can or should attempt to be relevant to social movements. In their exploration of the history of naturalist approaches to ethnography, Hammersley and Atkinson (2007: 17) express skepticism about the extent to which academic research can contribute towards practice. They argue that researchers overestimate 'the actual and potential contribution of research to policy and practice.'

serving and exploitative, prioritizing professional advancement over the urgent needs identified by social movements' (Johnston & Goodman 2006: 10). The social context can of course change, and that is arguably one of the goals of fieldwork. Nevertheless, by choosing not to study my own community I will always be 'returning' to a different social context (with its own expectations and demands) than the ones the movements are in.

Additionally, the dialogue required for movement-relevant research to be successful must be intentional and happen at multiple scales throughout the research process. This includes engagement and dialogue with the movement *before research even begins*. Chatterton et al (2010) discuss this often overlooked aspect of activist-inspired research and the difficulties of making this happen, even with communities in which the researcher is already embedded (let alone those communities to whom the researcher is a stranger). Needless to say, this research project did not begin with those relationships and dialogue already in place.

The most difficult and profound obstacle to producing movement-relevant research, of which I can only briefly mention here, is that the movement may not have use of the theory-oriented contribution that the academic researcher is usually ready (trained) to make (Ricardo, CTU activist, Caracas, personal interview, 15 April 2010; see also Chatterton et al 2010; Motta 2011b). Again, Barker and Cox (2001: 33) have addressed this and suggest that academic research has a tendency to 'fix' knowledge into a time and place, thus limiting its relevance to movements. I believe, however, that this problematic goes beyond an issue of timing (though that certainly has a part to play, see Megoran 2006: 638) and has to do with epistemological assumptions, which are evident in the Extended Case Method, regarding who produces what kinds of knowledges. This is what Motta (2011b: 185) calls an 'epistemological division of labour' which is premised on a dualism 'between the concrete



knowledge (of particular places and communities)... and universal knowledge (in the space of structures by intellectual experts)...’ If understood as a particular kind of contribution (e.g. theory production), movement-relevant research runs the risk of reproducing this relationship of domination and neglecting the mutual learning that is possible<sup>21</sup> from the concrete practices and theory production that movements already do.<sup>22</sup>

With all of this in mind, my methodological orientation led to engagement with the CTU movement that at times manifested itself in unexpected ways. To begin with, I explicitly asked CTU activists how my research could be made relevant to the movement’s interests. On one occasion, I was asked to produce a synthesis of the final research product (Pioneers Meeting, Caracas, 4 May 2010). However, more often my question was shrugged off or left unanswered until I was implicitly asked to participate and demonstrate solidarity with the movement. At times, this involved wearing the movement’s t-shirt and marching to the National Assembly or distributing pamphlets about the Urban Land Regularization Law at the metro station. Other times I was asked to give my opinion about a situation that the movement was facing or to participate in debates that the movement had about the state and popular power. Other times, my research tools (field notes, film, and recorded interviews) were requested in order to clarify what was said during the course of a debate or to serve as part of the archive of materials the movement has collected throughout its history. Finally, my participation in a variety of movement spaces and my ability to be mobile

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<sup>21</sup> For example, Unwin (2000: 24) discusses the importance of geographers to relate theories of space to human activity because most research is silent about what humans can do to transform space. However, his solution to this concern proposes that academic geographers must be the ones to imagine ‘alternative social and political formations, and ways in which these might be achieved,’ rather than learn with agents who are already acting in ways to transform space.

<sup>22</sup> In fact, I would argue that movement-relevant research, of the kind I have defined above, is already practiced within the CTU movement and among other popular organizations. See Chapter 4 for more on this discussion. As additional evidence that this kind of work is happening across Venezuela, I participated in a number of classes at the University of Simón Rodríguez where students are in dialogue with their respective communities or organizations and are producing what I would consider to be movement-relevant research.

(due to finances and lack of other responsibilities) meant that I was sometimes used as a conduit of information from place to place.<sup>23</sup> Overall, my openness to producing research for the interests of the movement more often looked like what Mathers and Novelli (2007) have described as 'ethnography as solidarity and praxis'. Elsewhere, Kalra (2006: 456) suggests that an ethnographic project with an emphasis on participation might be 'the most significant contributions that can be made by ethnographers to a political process.'

It should be recognized that while participant-observation allowed for the necessary proximity in order to engage with the movement in the ways described above, the positionality that the researcher chooses to adopt in such a situation, regardless of her attempt to examine the 'interconnectedness to that "beyond",' has a particular consequence on the product of research. In this instance, participant-observation, my temporary home in the barrios, and a position of solidarity allowed me entrance into the internal workings of the movement – certainly a benefit to the research project. However, certain limitations also arose. Though always intending to offer a critique of the movement and an analysis of the connections between scales, as well as a careful study of its history and practices, my ability to do the former was made more difficult by close proximity than originally anticipated. This was so for two primary reasons.

First, mired in the fast-paced details and difficulties of everyday life in the barrios, the interconnectedness to wider spatial scales sometimes faded from view or was difficult to unravel from the actions of specific individuals. Moreover, the position from the barrio did not always allow for investigation into other perspectives (e.g. from state institutions) on particular events or situations. This positionality often begged the question, did a specific

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<sup>23</sup> This even extended to my participation at the US Social Forum in Detroit, June 2010, where I assisted in organizing a workshop to discuss the experience of Venezuelan popular movements in which activists of the CTU movement participated via video conference.

interaction between the movement and a state institution, for instance, speak to systemic themes or was it merely the consequence of rogue personalities? Can individual action and the systems in which they act be separated? While attempting to stretch place beyond its boundaries, time in the field and location, of course, limit the extent to which that is possible.

Second, while close proximity to the movement was not a difficult position to assume, given experience as a grassroots activist in dispossessed communities in my home country, I was exposed to internal discussions and problems within the movement that raised questions about what was 'reportable'. In the end, I chose not to report these struggles in detail, primarily because they were not the focus of my research questions (see below for more on ethical considerations in research). The internal dynamics of the movement – over which I agonized for many hours during fieldwork and again in the writing-up of the thesis – served to highlight how difficult it is, in the mode of participant-observation, to pursue the intent of the research project and to develop a suitable, critical analysis of the movement and its impact on urban space.

The position of the researcher and the decisions to not include sensitive information about internal struggles of the movement have resulted in a written body of work that dedidedly treats the CTU movement on its own terms. For this reason, it is useful to imagine that the findings and conclusions of this work can be usefully paired with research that adopts other viewpoints, which might round-out the anaylsis of the transformation of urban space in Venezuela.<sup>24</sup>

On the question of research ethics, there are significant ethical considerations involved in

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<sup>24</sup> I appreciate my reviewers, Andreas Bieler and Doreen Massey, for encouraging me to think more deeply about the effects of participant-observation on this research project.

engaging research subjects. In her work on Mexican migrants to the United States, Judith Adler Hellman (2008) carefully considers the issue of 'do no harm', which within the formal procedures of academic institutions is considered the ethical standard of research protocol. Associated with this standard are an assortment of tools to protect the subjects of research from harm, such as full disclosure about the research project and explicit permission by research subjects to include them in the written work. As Hellman suggests, the boundaries and assumptions that underpin such an approach to ethics fail to consider the real world human interactions that happen when an ethnographer is 'in the field'. In my case, some of the more important moments of research happened through chance encounters or in a room of 100 people. In addition, though my research interest was clear – to understand how barrio inhabitants engage in the transformation of the city – it was not always clear what of my seven months in Venezuela was part of answering that question. Did talking to the taxi driver on the way to the airport amount to research? Did attending a Mother's Day celebration? How about a late night discussions over Polar Ice beers? These questions were hard to answer, and on occasion, explicitly choosing to be a 'researcher' operating under a certain code of ethics exposed an ethnocentrism that at times put my relationship with the movement at risk and undermined the political orientation of the project.

In the end, I share Hellman's (ibid.: 237) conclusion when she says,

the central ethical challenge is not whether you induce people to talk to you or how you explain what will become of their story, but the judgment you exercise in determining which details you can safely incorporate into a book without compromising the safety, well-being, and future status of the people who have spoken to you...

In response to the question, how can this research be made relevant to the movement, one activist told me, 'What we need you to do is tell others about what is going on here, in the words that people you know would understand. You can't make a comparison, because there is none, but you can share ideas' (Ricardo, CTU activist, Caracas, personal interview, 15 April 2010). With Hellman's and Ricardo's words in my mind, it is clearer that what is written and how it is written are the driving ethical choices in research.

Though perhaps distinct to Hellman's concerns, because the movement participants I spent time with were not at immediate risk of deportation or because this thesis may never publicly 'see the light of day' in Venezuela, there are nonetheless ethical considerations in terms of participants' exposure to critique within the movement or by the Venezuelan state. There are also concerns about accuracy and representation. In the first instance, as is common practice, I have done my best to protect the identity of movement participants by changing their names and, though their place of residence is identified in general terms (e.g. Caracas) for the purpose of trying to make both the research bias and the movement's own bias towards Caracas transparent, I have not linked people to specific barrio locations so as to make it more difficult to identify them. In the case of public officials and those activists who have publicly presented or published work, I have retained their real names. As far as accuracy and representation, while I strove to be true to participants' intended meaning and to draw on a variety of sources to tell a narrative, the quality of accuracy will only be determined in the 'fifth moment of research' when the movement reads the thesis for itself.

Despite the obstacles, the unexpected takes on relevancy, and the mistakes of a first-time researcher, I believe that the questions that this project is pursuing run parallel to the questions and concerns of the CTU movement. These questions include, how can barrio

residents make cities more just places in which the needs and values of the inhabitants are prioritized over those of the state and capital? What must they as inhabitants do to make that happen?<sup>25</sup> As such, I do not consider this project to be a case study in which theory is applied (or derived) and tested. Rather, I see theory and practice bound in a relationship of praxis (Freire 1972; Johnston & Goodman 2006). The written theoretical work of Lefebvre, for example, is being used in order to illuminate the practice and theory-making of the CTU movement, while the practices and theories of the movement 'give further insights into the theories used' in this project (Baiochi & Connor 2008: 150).

## **THE VENEZUELAN URBAN LAND COMMITTEES**

Five weeks before the coup against Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez on 11 April 2002, which famously saw his return to the presidency two days later, another important but lesser-known event happened in Venezuela. On 4 February, President Chávez issued Decree 1666 to begin 'the process of regularizing urban land tenancy occupied by barrios and poor urbanized areas...' (Decree No. 1666, Article 1, 2002). The decree instructs state governments and institutions to issue land titles to barrio residents who inhabit state-owned land. In a country where almost 95 per cent of the population lives in urban cities and towns, and 60 per cent of those live in barrios with no prior legal claim to the land, the potential impact of the decree is significant. In fact, the decree and the 2006 law that followed it has the potential to affect more Venezuelans than any other national legislation, except for education laws (Wilpert 2003:113).

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<sup>25</sup> Another question that is a concern of the movement's, and is implicitly addressed in this research project's concern about opportunities and limitations for popular power construction, is the relationship between popular power and the state.

In order to obtain land titles barrio residents must form an Urban Land Committee (CTU).

According to the decree, the CTUs are meant to

- 1) foster public participation in the development of the Special Law for Comprehensive Regularization of Land Tenancy of Popular Urban Settlements (from here called the Urban Land Regularization Law, which was passed in 2006),
- 2) identify the boundaries of their territory and compile an inventory of housing,
- 3) write a *Carta del Barrio* (Barrio Charter) which includes a list of residents, a barrio history and a future vision for the barrio, and
- 4) begin discussion on how to improve the barrios (Article 8, Section 3).
- 5) each CTU should involve between 200-400 households. Once formed, a CTU can then apply for titles for each of its member households.<sup>26</sup>

Since the implementation of the decree, the CTU movement also participated in the writing of the 2006 Urban Land Regularization Law, one of the first laws that was 'hammered out with those actually affected by it' (Wilpert 2003: 113). Then in 2011, the reform of the Urban Land Regularization Law was passed, in which the CTUs also played a significant role in writing. This latter law includes the creation of a Land Bank and implementation of popular oversight of the land regularization process; it expands the legal understanding of private property ownership to include collective ownership and facilitates the titling of privately-owned land, among other important changes.

With over 7,000 registered Urban Land Committees, the CTUs comprise one of the most

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<sup>26</sup> See Chapter 4 for more details about this process.

significant popular organizations in the country. Indeed, since their creation the CTUs have become what scholars and activists recognize as 'one of the few expressions that we can see of an autonomous popular organization [in Venezuela]' (Gerardo, Pobladores Movement activist, Caracas, personal interview, 6 May 2010; see also García-Guadilla 2006; Wilpert 2007). What makes the CTUs particularly interesting is that unlike other Venezuelan state-born organizations, such as the Bolivarian Circles (Hawkins & Hansen 2006) or the famous *misiones* (Wilpert 2007), at their inception many CTUs organized themselves independent of state institutional mediation, instead putting into practice the principles of self-organization and the mutual exchange of knowledge<sup>27</sup> and drawing on local, historical experiences of popular organization.<sup>28</sup> This relative organizational independence has since given rise to a politics that goes beyond the remit of the decree, at times challenging state institutions and questioning the very premise on which the CTUs were established: private property ownership.

Over the past decade, the CTU movement has produced a platform of struggle that includes the rehabilitation and infrastructural development of the barrios, the expansion of property laws to include collective ownership, and the titling of private land to barrio residents. Those CTUs that are involved in this agenda organize themselves beyond their local barrio at the district, regional, and national scales, and increasingly the movement is making connections at an international scale.<sup>29</sup> As already discussed, more recently some parts of the movement, especially those CTUs in Caracas, have begun to call for the right to the city, seeking to change not just the barrios but the social relations of the city more broadly in terms of

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<sup>27</sup> See Chapter 5.

<sup>28</sup> See Chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>29</sup> Not all CTUs are involved in these political campaigns. Therefore, I make the distinction between CTUs (the individual barrio organizations that apply for land title) and the CTU movement which refers to those CTUs that are also involved in on-going articulation with each other and participate in these wider political agendas.



governance structure and access to a variety of kinds of housing. These CTUs are working with other organizations under the configuration of the Pobladores Movement.

Even more than the above platform suggests, what we see in the CTUs and in other popular efforts across Venezuela and Latin America is what some have argued is a new form of popular organization that cannot be fully understood using classical political categories that are premised on state-centric assumptions of power and liberal market logics (Motta 2009, 2011a). Indeed, the CTUs are engaged in a struggle to transform society by 'putting up the foundation of a new form of power, constructed on the direct participation of the people' (Antillano 2006: 204). This new form of power, or popular power, is working with, against, and beyond state institutional structures (Antillano 2005; Dangl 2010; Motta 2011a). It is playing a significant role in what some refer to as the 'left turn' in Latin America (Cleary 2006; Rochlin 2007; Kozloff 2008; Beasley-Murray et al 2009) in which 'social political movements [are] oriented toward transforming the institutional basis of bourgeois state power' (Petras & Veltmeyer 2006: 91)<sup>30</sup> and have been a catalyst to usher in and/or maintain left-leaning governments that propose a challenge to the global neoliberal economic paradigm.<sup>31</sup>

## **POPULAR POWER AND A 'LEFT TURN' IN LATIN AMERICA**

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<sup>30</sup> Following the work of Antonio Gramsci (1971), 'the state is but a form of social relations' (Morton 2007: 89).

<sup>31</sup> The question of whether Latin American governments do or can present such a challenge is raised by Nicolas Grinberg (2010) who suggests that recent policy changes, despite their social orientation, have not fundamentally altered their respective national economies (see also Cleary 2006: 45-6; Webber 2011: 189-202). From an autonomist-Marxist perspective, John Holloway (2002) famously and fundamentally questions the effectiveness of state-led struggle against neoliberalism. And despite their theoretical assumption that the state is necessary to 'revolutionary' transformation, James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer (2006) also doubt the extent to which electoral politics can lead to such a transformation. Though based in distinct assumptions about the relationship between capitalism and the state, these viewpoints speak of a fundamental issue that Latin American popular movements are struggling over at the moment and that, despite tentative relationships with certain governments or state institutions, is decidedly open to debate.

The purpose of this section is to set the wider context in which the CTUs were born, while also highlighting the participation of popular actors in the changing political conditions in the region. This is important in as much as it also offers a contextual frame for understanding the election of Hugo Chávez in 1998 and the emergence of the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela, topics that will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

The past decades of neoliberal policies in Latin America have wreaked havoc on the region. While the 1980s are often referred to as the 'lost decade' because of the deep economic crisis and crippling debt that many Latin American countries experienced, the introduction of neoliberalism through consent and coercion (Margheritis & Pereira 2007: 35; Robinson 2008; Morton 2011: 122) has exacerbated some of the problems of the 1980s and created new ones (Veltmeyer 1998: 12). Thus, neoliberal policies, which have included the privatization of state-owned enterprises, liberalization of the market and unfettered insertion into the global economy, the deregulation of finance capital, fiscal discipline, the weakening of labor organization and rights, and reduced state intervention into the economy have brought with them severe economic volatility (at times leading to currency devaluations), higher rates of poverty, greater economic disparity, decreased formal employment, increased displacement of peasants and indigenous peoples, and increased environmental degradation, among others (Grynspan 2004; Parker 2005; Saenz 2002; Portes & Roberts 2005: 47-56; Margheritis & Pereira 2007; Robinson 2008: 232-4, 252; Morton 2011: 126-7).<sup>32</sup> These same decades have been peppered with massive protests against neoliberal policies involving millions of people, starting with protests in the 1980s (Bond 2001: 8) – one of the most dramatic of which was the week-long urban uprising against structural adjustment in Venezuela in

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<sup>32</sup> David Harvey (2005: 13) reminds us that the application and impact of neoliberal policies varies from place to place. 'Its frequently partial and lop-sided application from one state and social formation to another, testifies to the tentativeness of neoliberal solutions and the complex ways in which political forces, historical traditions, and existing institutional arrangements all shaped why and how the process of neoliberalization actually occurred.' See also Margheritis and Pereira (2007: 35-7).

1989<sup>33</sup> – and are ongoing.

In addition, the ongoing exacerbation of economic inequalities is viewed by popular movements as coterminous with elitist democratic regimes that were adopted after the era of military dictatorship (Pearce 2004; Figueroa 2006) and which are perceived to favour the wealthy over the poor (Robinson 2008: 271). Thus, protests against neoliberal economic policies also reflect deep discontent with the liberal democratic system, and popular movements are pushing to re-examine 'the fundamental constitutional tenets of Latin American republics' and to create new forms of democracy and 'modes of politics' (Beasley-Murray et al. 2009). This is not a rejection of democracy, per se, but a critique of *liberal* democracy premised on elite control of state power and resources which has systematically excluded the majority of the population through political and economic mechanisms (Plaza 1980; Pearce 2004; Figueroa 2006: 192; Beasley-Murray et al. 2009: 325; Cameron 2009: 339-41; Luna & Filgueira 2009: 377; Motta 2011a; Morton 2011: 191). As Pearce (2004: 487) suggests, 'many social activists in Latin America are democratic skeptics for whom liberalism is a mere discourse that masks the abuse of power by elites.'

Unlike the armed leftist movements of the past, however, the contemporary Latin American left is resisting systematic political and economic dispossession in part through electoral politics (Cleary 2006; Robinson 2008). As a result, left governments have recently been elected in Venezuela, Brazil, Bolivia, Argentina, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Peru, and Uruguay.<sup>34</sup>

Many of these governments have begun to embark on projects that are legislating new

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<sup>33</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>34</sup> It is probably more accurate to speak of new lefts, as movements and governments alike are notable for their diversity and the fact that 'they do not represent unified solutions to the paradigmatic crises they expose' (Luna & Filgueira 2009: 382; see also Ellner 2005; Cleary 2006; Robinson 2008: 290-4; Cameron 2009; French 2009). Indeed, Jeffery Webber's (2011) work on Bolivia examines the multiple ideological positions on both the left and the right that has, for now, coalesced around the leadership of Evo Morales.

forms of democracy which favor participatory democracy, the protection and inclusion of historically excluded subaltern groups such as indigenous peoples, the decentralization of national government, and new regional integration efforts such as the *Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra America* (ALBA, The Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America) which seeks to promote non-capitalist forms of regional integration and exchange (Muhr forthcoming).<sup>35</sup> Within this panorama of crisis, protest, and change, Venezuela, under the leadership of President Hugo Chávez and with a project towards Twenty-First Century Socialism, has become a leading protagonist of the left(s) in Latin America and a central point of reference for academic analysis of the recent regional shift.

While much of the literature about this so-called left turn emphasizes the left governments and their respective presidential leaders, one of the core features of this regional shift is the mobilization of the popular actors who in some cases, most notably in Bolivia (see Webber 2011), have been instrumental in carrying left electoral candidates to victory (Rochlin 2007: 1327-30; Robinson 2008: 290; Beasley-Murray et al. 2009: 320). In fact, Cleary (2006: 38) argues that 'what all of these cases have in common is that the development of mass-mobilizing structures preceded leftist electoral victories by at least a decade.' More importantly perhaps, popular movements have gained legitimacy and 'value in their own right', a value which is not premised on a bid for state power but on the critique of multiple forms of cultural and social domination, in addition to economic exploitation (Pearce 2004: 498). Instead of a vision of controlling the state, resistance has been translated into demands to decentralize state institutional power and expand opportunities for popular participation (Motta 2011a: 36). Nowhere is this more clear than in Venezuela where popular power is a

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<sup>35</sup> Again, Jeffrey Webber's (2011) work comes to mind as a sympathetic but sharp critique of how much these governments are actually accomplishing in the way of an anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist agenda. His analysis advises against the 'romanticism' of the international left and suggests a focus on the rich, internal debates that emanate from each country.

central, if still unrealized (García-Guadilla 2008), precept of the Bolivarian Revolution. Emphasizing how this shifting paradigm has affected everyday life in the region, Venezuelan historian Margarita López Maya (2005: 11) offers a vivid image of the past several decades, saying, 'Common, every-day people came out onto the street and still have not returned to their houses.'

Herein lies one departure point for this research project. The Venezuelan Bolivarian Revolution is often characterized and studied as an example of top-down revolution premised on the personality cult of Chávez (Ramírez 2005; Motta 2011a; Spanakos 2011)<sup>36</sup> in comparison to bottom-up revolution paradigmatically represented by the Zapatistas, the indigenous movements in Bolivia, the Brazilian Landless Workers' Movement, or the World Social Forum (Slater 2004: 205-22; Rochlin 2007; French 2009; Karriem 2009; Morton 2011: 199-233).<sup>37</sup> Popular agency in Venezuela is made invisible by certain theoretical and methodological assumptions about political practice which emphasize state power and neglect popular subjectivities and knowledges (Motta 2011a, 2011b). While we will see throughout this research that the state figures prominently in creating opportunities and limitations to popular action, it does not tell the whole story. Such an account of Venezuela suffers from the same problems as populist accounts of the Chávez era and so-called

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<sup>36</sup> Several authors suggest that the new lefts in Latin America, pushed by the practices of popular movements, require new political categories for adequate engagement and analysis. Specifically in regards to Venezuela, they take issue with the dual tendency to reduce popular mobilization to the effects of 'populism', thus analytically stripping popular subjects of their agency, and to measure the 'goodness' of a regime against the standard of social/representative democracy. For more on these issues, please see Ramírez (2005), Reygadas (2005), Arditi (2008), Motta (2009, 2011a), Beasley-Murray et al. (2009), and Cameron (2009). In a different way, Venezuelan philosopher and popular activist Roland Denis (quoted in Spronk & Webber 2011), argues that there is in fact a 'cult of personality' around Chávez but that this is a problem within the state bureaucracy which then uses its power to close down autonomous spaces and absorb popular energies. This is an important point that will be returned to in Chapters 4 and 6.

<sup>37</sup> There are certainly exceptions to this approach, such as the work of Fernandes, S. (2007, 2010a, 2010b), Motta (2009, 2011b), and Ramírez (2005) who work with popular movements in Venezuela. Their research reveals the new political subjectivities that are emerging in Venezuela that often raise considerable questions regarding the relationship between these actors, the interests of the Venezuelan state, and mainstream interpretations of the Bolivarian Revolution.

*'chavismo'* (see Ellner 2001; Roberts 2003; Hawkins & Hansen 2006) that, in paying so much attention to the figure of Chávez, obscure the creative, competing tensions that are coming from the grassroots and that have contributed to the construction of the Bolivarian Revolution. This approach also often overlooks the fact that Chávez himself came from a popular struggle (Wilpert 2003) and that experimentation and evaluation of alternative political forms are emerging from the popular classes which are, in some cases, producing antagonisms within the pro-revolutionary stance (Denis 2006, 2007). Recognizing the structural circumstances surrounding popular mobilization may offer part of the picture but does not offer explanations for how popular movements attempt to construct popular power that seeks autonomy from the state and how that process of construction involves transformative potential of its own.

While Venezuela's revolution has its own historical peculiarities, which will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 3, and there is much to be said about the discourse of the Chávez regime, my interest is in understanding how popular actors, who poured out on the streets in the uprising of 1989 and never went home, are attempting to construct popular power and transform the (urban) spaces that they inhabit. The importance of these popular actors and their political differentiation from the Chávez government has been noted elsewhere. After interviews with various activists from several popular organizations around Venezuela, Ramírez (2005: 91) remarks that many Venezuelan activists who support the Chávez government

are seasoned supporters of a larger revolutionary process that values the expansion of direct participatory democracy, the extension of public powers to civil society, and the development of social policies that prioritize the

poor with the goal of changing traditional power relationships in Venezuela and internationally...

Similarly, in reference to the CTU movement, Motta (2011a: 42) concludes that '[t]heir practice is therefore not only an attempt to ameliorate their social conditions within dominant structures of power but an effort to rethink and remake the forms in which power is exercised.'

These new forms of politics involve the production of subaltern knowledges, horizontal and democratic organizational methodologies, and the reconfiguration of social relations based on equality (Motta 2009: 35-6). Thus, like other Latin American countries, Venezuela is experiencing the transformation of popular consciousness through the practices of new forms of organization, the construction of diverse popular subjectivities, and multiple forms of dis/engaging the state (Chatterton 2005; de Souza 2006; Harris 2007; Dangl 2010; Fernandes 2010a; Motta 2011a; Spronk & Webber 2011).

## **URBAN TRANSFORMATION**

It is a core theoretical premise of this research project that the remaking of social relations entails the production and transformation of space, as well (Lefebvre 1991/1974). The focus here is on the relationship between the *construction of popular power and the transformation of urban space*. This is so precisely because the city, particularly Caracas, is a key site of struggle in the Bolivarian Revolution. David Harvey (2008: 40) has recently argued, echoing Henri Lefebvre (2003/1970) and Neil Smith (1984), that 'the revolution has to be urban, in the broadest sense of that term, or nothing at all.' By urban, he means 'the process

of integrated spaces across national territory, if not beyond' (Harvey 2008: 28). For Harvey and Lefebvre before him, the urban, as both a place and a process, must be transformed for social justice to be possible. Along a similar vein, the transformation of urban space in Venezuela – that is, the transformation of how the city is produced and the reworking of urban social relations that involve the state, capital, and *all* urban inhabitants – is essential to producing a socialism that is premised on popular power. Moreover, the barrios are central to the force behind the Bolivarian Revolution (Denis, quoted in Spronk & Webber 2011; Fernandes 2010a, 2010b). Accordingly, both the strength of the Bolivarian Revolution and the focus of it (both from a state policy perspective and a popular organization perspective) have to do with the urban.

This is perhaps not surprising considering that in Venezuela almost 95 per cent of the population lives in what are considered to be urban areas, making it one of the most urbanized countries in the world. The high degree of urban-ness in Venezuela makes the question of urban transformation, even apart from the revolution, politically significant. However, rather than setting Venezuela apart, this status reflects a global trend: the shift from a rural-majority world to an urban-majority world (Davis 2006). This is especially true with respect to the global South where 90 per cent of the urban growth is occurring (ibid.: 2). This growth is characterized by the rapid expansion of 'mega-cities' (such as Mexico City and São Paulo) and 'primate cities' (of which Caracas is one [Meyers 1978]) where a concentration of a country's people and economic and political power are located. In the case of Venezuela, the Metropolitan Area of Caracas serves as the country's political capital, the location through which most financial resources flow, and is home to one-quarter of the Venezuelan urban population.



In the global South, it is not just the numbers of people that are important but the conditions under which they live. Urban population growth has exceeded states' capacity or willingness to produce a built environment that accommodates the influx of migrants, resulting in massive infrastructure deficits, such as lack of housing and poor access to clean water. Hence, large parts of these cities have been self-produced (often in illegal, clandestine or ignored ways) by urban inhabitants. In fact, 'citizens [in developing countries] continue... to play a much greater role in shaping urban space than they do in core countries. [For example,] much of the housing and basic urban amenities are secured by self-help and reciprocity, and not by state and market' (Roberts 1989: 672-3). As a result, about 43 per cent of urban residents in the world live in these self-built areas, or barrios. However, this average masks the vast disparity between regions: in Africa as many as 72 per cent of urban residents live in shantytowns, compared to just 6 per cent in the global North (UN HABITAT 2003: 13). Again, Venezuela tops the charts in Latin America with 60 per cent of its urban population living in barrios (Villalobosy and Gonzalez 2001). While rural communities are still the poorest in the world, the majority of the global poor are now located in urban areas (UN HABITAT 2003: xxvi).

For some, neoliberal capitalism, what Harvey (2005: 33) pithily describes as 'the financialization of everything,' has made the urban an even more important site of struggle. 'Cities,' as Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore (2002: 375) argue, 'have become increasingly central to the reproduction, mutation, and continual reconstitution of neoliberalism itself during the last two decades.' Similarly, speaking in terms of the world economy Saskia Sassen's (2001: 266) work makes the case that 'the large city of today has emerged as a strategic site for a wide range of new types of operations – political, economic, "cultural", subjective. It is one of the nexi where the formation of new claims by both the powerful and

the disadvantaged, materializes and assumes concrete forms.' This means that the city is also a 'potent battleground for struggles seeking greater democracy, equality, and justice' (Soja 2010: 96; see also Chombert de Lauwe 1995: 41; Isin 2000: 6; Nicholls 2008).

Even though urban geography literature, such as that referenced above, opens some doors for analysis of urban space it is often limited to a selective analysis of so-called 'global' cities, resulting in the almost complete absence of cities in the global South (Grant & Nijman 2002: 320-1; Rao 2006: 225-6). So while the importance of urban space, especially in relation to global capital, is widely recognized, particular urban places (in the global South) and (popular) agents are not.<sup>38</sup> Barrio dwellers, in particular, are often left out of theoretical analysis or portrayed as helpless victims of global forces (Angotti 2006; Pithouse 2006: 1-4), despite attempts to 'recover the meaning of place and of *multiple diverse social groups* in constituting globalization' (Sassen 2006: 177, emphasis added). Yet it is these very places where urban change is so profound and these very agents who – along with the state, capital, and other urban inhabitants – are producing and transforming these places. Such recognition is both politically and practically essential for any future study of urban space, especially for urban centers of the global South. As Vyjayanthi Rao (2006: 227) suggests, 'The city seen from the South [and from the barrio, one might add] provides occasion to rethink the contours of modernity in a global age.'

Of course, in the case of Venezuela, this task is complicated by the heavy shadow of the state, which is analytically the focus of much academic work and is a significant aspect of Venezuelan daily life, even long before Chávez took power. In fact, when asked what is the

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<sup>38</sup> As Slater (1989: 17) says, 'This particular modality of universalism which omits to consider "non-Western societies", represents an implicit negation of their relevance for general theory.' As such, we must be careful in trying to 'apply' such a theory (e.g. global cities theory) and instead regard it as a sign-post pointing towards a general direction.

greatest obstacle the movement faces, most CTU activists responded in one form or another 'the State.' The relationship to the state is one of the concerns that most occupies movement activists' discussions, even while many are still supportive of Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution. While desiring to keep this problematic at the forefront of our attention, my interest is to do so in a way that recognizes that popular actors are also agents in their own right, that they are not simply victims of socio-economic exclusion or reducible to agents of state interests, but they are producers and transformers of the cities in which they reside.

This is not an insignificant point. On the one hand, much of the research about cities, while proclaiming the importance of people, neglects to consider how these people, especially the dispossessed, shape the cities they live in. The focus is instead on how capital and the state produce urban space (Harvey 1973, 1989; Smith 1984), implicitly suggesting that movements (and people more generally) are products of the macro-forces beating upon them (see Davis 2006; Carolini 2005; UN HABITAT 2003). On the other hand, too often when urban popular actors are given proper attention the question of urban transformation is left aside as 'far-fetched', considering the limited power and influence that urban popular movements usually have (Schuurman 1989: 12). In this case, 'the spatiality of movements, power and politics has been marginalized' (Slater 1997: 259). My interest is to join the two sides of the equation and thereby engage in a more 'enabled' analysis of urban popular power.<sup>39</sup> Responding to this

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<sup>39</sup> This idea of engaging with theory in a way that 'enables' political agency draws from the work of Gillian Hart (2002: 14) who, in her critique of globalization discourses, argues for theories and methods that 'disrupt impact models and open the way for more politically enabling understandings and critical practices.' This is similar to other work that seeks to theoretically 'decenter' (Leitner et al 2007: 5) or create 'distance' from (Gibson-Graham 2006: xxi) neoliberal globalization in order to recognize how processes are produced across places (Hart 2002; Marcus 1998) and thus are open and contingent, allowing for imagining and acting alternatives. Lefebvre also intends for his theory of space to build a new agency-centered political project (Unwin 2000: 15). This approach offers alternatives to a more widespread trend among globalization proponents and critics alike whose analyses make out neoliberal globalization to be almost-impenetrable, as the 'absolute reign of ascending capital' (Petras & Morley 1990, quoted in Bond & Mayekiso 1996) to which we can hardly hope to resist (Pieterse 2000), sometimes in spite of the interest of the researcher to in fact resist (Leitner et al 2007: 5).

kind of approach from the field of urban studies, Edward Soja (2010: 10, emphasis added) observes that

this alternative and intensely politicized way of looking at cityspace, combining both macro and micro perspectives without privileging one over the other, has been much less frequently explored in the literature on cities, *for too often the views from above and below have been defined as separate and competitive empirical and interpretive domains rather than interactive and complementary moments* in our understanding of urbanism and its spatial specificities.

Though this research project cannot claim to pay equal empirical attention to the macro and micro perspectives that Soja mentions, Henri Lefebvre's (1991/1974) theory regarding the 'production of space', which will be discussed in Chapter 2, will allow us to hold them in constant theoretical tension so as to address the primary research question by illuminating how the construction of popular power *desde abajo* ('from below') is implicated in the transformation of urban space in the Bolivarian Revolution. With particular reference to the Venezuelan state, the holding together of macro and micro perspectives will also enable an examination of the opportunities and limitations that popular agents face in the revolution. This allows an engagement with the Bolivarian Revolution that is at once open to the possibilities that activists claim it offers, as well as, constructively critical of the barriers that these same activists face in their pursuit of popular power and social transformation.

## **THE RIGHT TO THE CITY**

The CTU/Pobladores Movement is beginning to articulate the struggle to transform urban space as 'the right to the city', a concept that was coined by Lefebvre (1996/1968) after the 1968 urban uprisings and that has since been taken up by urban social movements around the world (Sassen 2006; Fernandes, E. 2007; Soja 2010)<sup>40</sup> and international institutions (UN HABITAT 2010), even leading to a 'World Charter on the Right to the City' (World Charter 2004; Fernandes, E. 2007). 'The right to the city stresses the need to restructure the power relations that underlie the production of urban space, fundamentally shifting control away from capital and the state and toward urban inhabitants' (Purcell 2004: 102).

Lefebvre (1996/1968) suggested that the city's main function is its 'use value' because cities are the 'centres of social and political life where not only wealth is accumulated, but knowledge (*connoissances*), techniques, and *oeuvres* (works of art, monuments). The city is itself "*oeuvres*"...' (ibid.: 66). However, the modern city has become appropriated by a rationality that seeks to suppress the *oeuvres* (ibid.: 132) to the logic of 'exchange value' and consumption (ibid.: 67, 73, 131). For example, we witness this in the idea of 'habitat', which once meant 'to take part in a social life, a community, village or city,' and is now reduced to the idea of 'housing' in the public discourse (ibid.: 76, 80). For Lefebvre, what was most concerning was the impact that this reduction to exchange value, where things in the city and the city itself is more and more understood by its market value, has on human subjectivity (ibid.: 149-151).

Who has a 'right to the city' according to Lefebvre? All the inhabitants of the city, regardless of formal state citizenship status (ibid.: 158). And what are these inhabitants to do?

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<sup>40</sup> This does not suggest that the 'right to the city' means the same thing to all urban movements. However, a common element of many of these movements from New York, Los Angeles, Caracas, Vancouver, São Paulo, Mexico City, and others is a demand for more affordable, dignified housing and the elimination of urban land speculation.

Suspicious that state-initiated forms of 'participation' are oppressive and reaffirm the tendency to homogenize and fracture society (ibid.: 145), Lefebvre argues that to truly claim the 'right to urban life', to transform the urban into a use value where human need is valued above market interests, inhabitants must 'appropriate' urban space, much in the way that the Pobladores Movement suggests in the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter. Similar to the interest of Latin American popular movements discussed above, according to Lefebvre, appropriation should take the form of direct participation, decision-making, and the production of new urban space that meets the needs of urban inhabitants.

Much research and many movements that claim 'the right to the city' (see Isin 2000; Mitchell 2003) focus on this idea of appropriation in terms of access to already-existing space but miss the important spatial components of Lefebvre's philosophy, which introduce 'a much broader and more structural meaning' (Purcell 2002: 103). As a result, 'his radical objectives [are] reduced to softer liberal egalitarianism or normative platitudes' (Soja 2010: 107) and appropriation is taken for 'inclusion' *into* urban space. Indeed, only by connecting the 'right to the city' with the idea of the 'production of space' is the full radicality of the concept revealed to involve the '[transformation of] both current liberal-democratic citizenship relations and capitalist social relations' (Purcell 2002: 103). Hence, movements that struggle for the 'right to the city', according to Lefebvre (2009: 228-9)

are resurrecting the concept of "use" without reducing it merely to the consumption of space. They emphasize the relations between people (individuals, groups, classes) and space with its different levels: the neighborhood and the immediate, the urban and its mediations, the region and the nation, and, finally, the worldwide. These movements are

experimenting with modes of action at diverse scales, always in the light of the participants' experience and knowledge... This understanding of space... must begin with the lived and the body, that is, from a space occupied by an organic, living, and thinking being (emphasis added).

It is this understanding of the right to the city – urban transformation by urban inhabitants through action that is based on their lived experiences and knowledges – that is investigated in this research project.

## **SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS**

The CTUs find themselves at the intersection of various historical and contested geographical and political processes: the Venezuelan Bolivarian Revolution where the idea of popular power is central and hotly debated; the broader 'left turn' in Latin America in which multiple scales of political action are being constructed; and the (global) city, an emerging site of struggle against neoliberal capitalism. Throughout this thesis we will see these intersections in how urban territory is claimed, defended, used, redefined, unified, and transformed through the practices of the CTU movement. Urban territory, though, is at the heart of a broader question about how the CTU strategies to construct popular power are transforming urban space in Venezuela. Hence, the following chapters are organized as follows:

Chapter 2 lays the foundations of the theoretical framework that is used as a tool to understand how the strategies of the CTU movement might lead to the transformation of urban space. This involves an engagement with the debate surrounding the concept of

popular power that is currently underway in Venezuela. It is argued that the construction of popular power is inherently spatial and that this spatiality links popular power with urban transformation. To explain this I use a 'critical concept of space' which suggests that social relations and space are mutually constituting. The chapter then looks at Henri Lefebvre's 'unifying three-fold dialectic of space' (Shields 1991: 52) as a way of understanding how different social relations produce different kinds of space. Of particular interest here is Lefebvre's (1991/1974) conception of 'lived space', which I argue forms the basis from which barrio residents can transform urban space. The chapter ends with a discussion of the other geographies that are involved in the construction of popular power and the transformation of urban space, including place, spatial scale, 'geographies of difference', and 'power-geometries' (Massey 1993, 2005).

The third chapter examines the historical production of urban space in Venezuela, paying special attention to urban land ownership since the colonial era, the impact of oil rents on the construction of Caracas, the transition to democracy, and the role of the barrios in the production of urban space post-1958. The underlying argument here is that in order to understand how space is produced and transformed in the contemporary period, we must understand the kind of space and social relations that have been produced in the past. In this way, the first three chapters set the stage for an understanding of how the CTU movement emerged and how its particular historical geographies have shaped its organizational process and political platform.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 focus on the Urban Land Committees and mostly draw from empirical research that was collected during fieldwork. Chapter 4 examines how the work of organizing individual CTUs and the movement are transforming the barrios. It describes the



regularization process and analyzes how the practices and principles involved in the process come from particular experiences of historical popular struggles that have since provided the basis from which the CTU movement emerged. The chapter also discusses the various scales of articulation that the movement has constructed over the years, the evolution of its political agenda, and the uneven geographies that make up the movement.

Following Lefebvre's (1991/1974) insight about how different knowledges affect the kind of urban space that is produced, Chapter 5 studies the knowledge production practices of the CTU movement. It argues that the popular education methodology that the movement adopted in 2004 has played a key role in helping the movement to articulate at a national scale. In itself this scale of articulation demonstrates that urban space is being transformed from that which was being produced by the fragmented popular relations of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Additionally, I argue that the popular education methodology has allowed the movement to produce 'collective lived space' that is based on geographies of difference. This has both strategic implications for the movement and theoretical implications for the production of space.

Chapter 6 is more explicitly concerned with what Lefebvre (1996/1968) has called 'the right to the city'. The right to the city involves the movement's ability to transform urban governance structures so that decision-making is in the hands of urban inhabitants themselves. Under examination in this chapter are three examples of what I consider to be right to the city strategies that have been employed by the CTUs from Caracas's Libertador District where the CTU movement has played a significant role in shaping the recent politics of the city. Chapter 6 also reflects more generally on the movement's relationship with the state and the alternate opportunities and limitations that the Venezuelan state provides for

the transformation of urban space in the country. Finally, Chapter 7 summarizes the insights gathered through the research project, returns to the question of the Pobladores Movement, and offers suggestions for future possible research.

## Chapter 2

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### POPULAR POWER AND THE PRODUCTION OF SPACE

*Is it possible for the people ['el pueblo'] to construct a politics? Here there are people who don't think it's possible. With 'here' I mean this process that we are living [in Venezuela]. So there are people who suggest that the thing that is missing is a strong state, that really the state pushes and is bringing about another model... They really think that this is the road towards what we call socialism... [and] there are a lot of people investing in the idea that there should be a party... a vanguard... that can orient these people over here who don't know what to do with their lives and need to be given direction...*

*There is, I think, a strong spirit in el pueblo, as a class. Even more, I think it's an inherited culture of resistance to be against these two positions.*

Gerardo, Popular Educator and Pobladores Movement activist, Caracas, personal interview, 6 May 2010

In May 2009, the CTU movement organized and participated in the 'Festival for Popular Power' (see Photo 2, p. 49) where they joined with peasant organizations and those organizations that comprise the Pobladores Movement to celebrate the accomplishments of popular organizations across the country. For a day, Plaza Venezolano, in the middle of the historic city center of Caracas, was filled with colorful booths, food from the countryside, and music and dance performances. In honor of the festival, the CTUs published and distributed a letter proclaiming the need for a socialism that is based on 'popular power'. The beginning of the letter reads as follows,

Socialism is not state capitalism, nor is it only about the redistribution of petroleum rents. Socialism is only possible if the producers (the peasants

who plant and harvest, the laborers who work the machines, the barrio residents who create the city every day, the creators of culture and communications, the whole of society) in effect manage the collective processes of social production. Socialism is infinite democracy, the people controlling all the processes that constitute collective life: the production and distribution of goods and services, public policies, laws, the small everyday decisions, and the large national decisions. *There will only be socialism when the people exercise power and are the makers of their own destiny. This is why we insist that there will not be socialism without popular power, without the people in charge, from the bottom up.* ('Sólo habrá socialismo si hay poder popular', emphasis added)

This concept of popular power – both as a process and an endpoint, where the people are the 'makers of their own destiny' – is central to grassroots struggles in contemporary Venezuela, if not across Latin America. The entry point for analysis in this thesis is through the strategies that are used in the construction of popular power by those who 'create the city every day', the barrio dwellers. For, as is argued throughout the thesis, these strategies are interrelated with the socio-spatial transformation of the city.

**Photo 2: Festival for Popular Power**



Radio-transmitted debate about popular power in the Bolivarian Revolution where CTU activists participated. June 2009. Photo by author.

Hence, the task of this chapter is to establish a framework, using a variety of theoretical tools, to visibilize the spatiality of popular power construction. This is important because the term 'popular power' is ubiquitous in Venezuela and Latin America more broadly, even to the extent that for observers the idea begins to lose its meaning and political import. In some academic studies it is seen as a populist attempt to appeal to the masses (take for example, the fact that all Venezuelan state ministries are entitled the 'Ministry of Popular Power for...'); passed off as an unrealistic, utopian idea (see Canovan 1999); or examined for its measure of institutionalization (see Irazábal & Foley 2010; López Maya 2004). Yet the attempted construction of popular power that underpins the grassroots work in the Bolivarian Revolution is a process involving the changing of social relations which, as will be discussed below, also has an effect on space.

David Harvey (2000: 159, 203) suggests that utopian thinking, the imagining of 'human possibilities', such as might be raised when invoking the idea of 'the people controlling all

the processes that constitute collective life,' is necessary to any political project that is interested in progressive social change. Treating the concept of popular power as *only* utopian, however, neglects the content-rich, actually-practiced, continuously-constructed political project that animates many of the popular movements in Latin America today, including those in Venezuela. The struggle to produce popular power, or 'control over the processes of social production' as the CTUs have put it, is not a struggle in the abstract but one that is grounded in concrete issues which affect the lived experiences of people, whether that be in terms of housing security, access to goods and services, sexual liberation, equality of gender relations, control over urban planning, the production of culture, etc. The spatial view of popular power that will be put forward in this research will allow us to see this content-richness and will emphasize the continuous construction that is necessary for its realization. Furthermore, it will connect the construction of popular power to the transformation of urban space.

In order to accomplish what I am suggesting – a spatially informed analysis of the construction of popular power in Venezuela – the chapter will seek to elaborate a 'critical concept of space'. After a discussion about popular power in the first section of the chapter, the second section will draw on the work of French theorist Henri Lefebvre (1991/1974; 1996/1968; 2009),<sup>1</sup> who introduced the idea of the 'production of space', and several other geographers as a starting point from which to elaborate a critical concept of space. I have chosen to use the concept of space and, more specifically, Lefebvre's work not because it necessarily holds an eternal truth (Massey 1998), but because it opens a pathway through which we might conceptualize the ideas of popular power and urban transformation as

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<sup>1</sup> Where possible I cite Lefebvre's work using both the date of publication in English and the date of original publication. This is useful to help identify the evolution in his thinking, particularly in regards to the urban and the production of space. For example, the movement from *The Right to the City* (1968) to *The Production of Space* (1974) is significant and is not captured by the English translation dates, 1991 and 1996, respectively.

interrelated processes and goals, while at the same time grounding them in the lived experiences and practices of popular urban movements.

The two sections move deeper into Lefebvre's work for insight into how popular power struggles might affect urban transformation in the face of state and capital domination. Lefebvre (1991/1974) offers a framework for thinking about space as a 'threefold dialectic' (Shields 1992) in which different kinds of knowledges and power produce different kinds of interrelated space, revealing how popular knowledges and practices produce potential revolutionary space. Along with analysis borrowed from James Scott (1998), Lefebvre's three-part framework helps to unravel and hold together the complex relationship between popular actors and the state, a crucial and historically-rooted concern for popular movements in Venezuela and a problematic that is at the center of the Bolivarian Revolution.

The final section points toward additional geographies – place, scale, unevenness, and difference – that are involved in popular power struggles and that contribute to the transformation of urban space. These geographies extend from an understanding of 'place' drawn from Doreen Massey's (1993, 1994, 2005) work. Recognizing that most popular struggles are rooted in a close identification with a particular territory or locality (for example, the CTUs call themselves a 'territorial movement'), this section discusses the mutually constituting relationship between localized territories, or places (e.g. the barrio), and wider spatial scales (such as the urban, the national and the global). In later chapters, Massey's idea of place opens the way towards thinking about the territory of the CTUs, the multiple scales of the movement, and the uneven geographies upon which the movement is constructed. Interwoven through all of these concepts is the theme of power, which for Lefebvre, Massey, and others is the crucial political element in the critical concept of space,

place and other geographies.

## **POPULAR POWER IN VENEZUELA**

Despite sometimes being labelled as an example of top-down revolution or the 'taking of state power', after time spent in Venezuela it is obvious that the Bolivarian Revolution is much more complex than this characterization allows. In his own reflections about the contemporary conjuncture, Venezuelan activist and philosopher Roland Denis (quoted in Spronk & Webber 2011) suggests that we think about the Bolivarian Revolution as the struggle between three 'republics'. The first is the 'bureaucratic-corporatist republic', the position taken by the Chávez government, which 'sees itself as having to decide and to lead what is in fact a much more complex popular movement than it understands' (ibid.: 247). The second is the 'old liberal-oligarchic republic' that is represented by the opposition and 'is very much connected to the global ideology of neoliberalism' (ibid.: 247-8). Finally, the third republic is 'based in self-government of land, social spaces, and spaces of production... It encompasses radical conceptualizations of democracy, and transcends the parochial view of the Venezuelan nation, looking instead towards what we call *Nuestra América*, or "Our America"' (ibid.: 248).

This section is interested in conceptualizing the forces behind this third republic, which I would suggest is the republic of popular power. Attempting to define popular power or delineate a theoretical framework for the idea, however, presents an interesting methodological consideration that was already mentioned in Chapter 1: popular power is a living, vivid example of the dialectic between theory and practice. That is to say, the very



definition of popular power is a focal point of struggle in Venezuela at the moment.<sup>2</sup> Rather than seeking to arrive at a fixed definition or a crystallized theoretical framework from which to identify popular power, this section concentrates instead on the debate surrounding the idea and the variety of aims that popular power strategies strive toward. Assisted by Antonio Gramsci's (1971) conceptualization of power, the main point here is that popular power should be thought of in terms of a process, a constant struggle against dominant forms of power.

Alongside the issue of creating Twenty-First Century Socialism, which is not examined in this thesis, the question of popular power - 'the people together, directly exercising their sovereign power' ('Sólo habrá socialismo si hay poder popular') - is a source of constant debate both within Venezuela and for its observers (see Spronk & Webber 2011). These debates involve questions such as, what is popular power? How is it constructed from practice? What is its status in Venezuela right now? (Day of Debate, ALBA Council of Social Movements, Caracas Chapter, 5 June 2010) Or in more practical terms, 'which practices allow us to really unite the power of the people, and which don't?' (Gerardo, Pobladores Movement activist, Caracas, personal interview, 6 May 2010) These debates involve further questions about the relationship between popular power and the state, the capacity or desire of the country's dispossessed to decide for themselves, the possibility for solidarity across geographies and social classes, ideological content, and historical and cultural contradictions that limit the realization of popular power, to name just a few. Importantly, even among supporters of the Bolivarian Revolution, the question of whether or not popular power is desirable is also implicit within the debate.

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<sup>2</sup> It is also worthwhile to point out the term popular power is often used to denote a 'thing' (e.g. an organization or mass of organizations) and a process.

The construction and exercise of popular power then is more than just making demands on the state, as traditional (one might say North American and Western European) approaches to social movements might suggest. Rather, it involves a questioning of the historical relationship between the state and its citizens. In broad strokes, Orlando Fals Borda defines popular power, or what he calls 'people's SpaceTimes' (fitting for this project's interest), as

the struggle for cultural recognition or affirmation of alternative constructs of 'the good life'; it is the struggle for control over territories, communities, and their resources or the defense of the space of material and cultural reproduction (quoted in Leal 2007: 546).

He goes on to explain what this means for political practice.

For local people to construct this type of popular power, they must engage in their own political and economic analysis of the local, national, and global realities, which will in turn determine their capacity to influence and affect power relations at higher social levels (ibid.).

This resonates with what was said by Denis (in Spronk & Webber 2011), above, where the 'third republic' in Venezuela is at once a struggle over communities' territorial control and an analysis beyond that land to other scales of politics. Similarly, Petras and Veltmeyer (2006: 103) have suggested in their study of other left-leaning Latin American countries that 'popular power' is 'control of working peoples of the state' (see also Lebowitz 2006).

While each of these thinkers point to territory as a central concern of popular power struggles (see also Motta 2009; Fernandes 2010a), one that will also be explored in this

thesis, it would be erroneous to suggest that simple control of state territory equates to popular power as Petras and Veltmeyer explicitly contend. Rather, authentic construction of popular power puts into question the current state form in terms of territory, democratic practice, institutions, and power relations.

Latin Americanist Sara Motta's (2009, 2011a, 2011b) work on Venezuelan popular politics emphasizes the new understandings of democracy, leadership and knowledge that popular power struggles are producing. She suggests that this involves deepening democratic practices through decentralized decision-making and intensive participation; the rejection of vertical power relations and the construction of horizontal leadership; and the use of local knowledges to establish a political project. For Motta (2011a) and Denis (2003) this diverse panorama of nascent popular participation suggests that popular power is a distinct political formation and involves practices that fall outside of traditional political conceptual tools (Motta 2009).

While still somewhat vague in content, popular power can at least be understood as a critique of traditional forms of politics, namely a critique of the state that has arisen out of the economic crises of the 1980s and 1990s. According to Denis (2006), 'these dispersed struggles defend the "Bolivarian Revolution" but at the same time they constitute a true testimony that the institutionalized idea of the state as the primary lever of the transformation process is exhausted.' In this sense the embrace of popular power by the people expresses a rejection of liberal discourses that revolve around 'the idea that politics is reducible to the state or that the state is the sole legitimate domain of politics' (Neocosmos 2006: 59; see also Motta 2011a; Dangle 2010: 5). Rather, popular power emphasizes the capacity of people to decide for themselves and through collective, autonomous action

create improved communities (Alinsky 1971: 11). Under this conception 'ordinary people become the key agents of politics and authority, delegation is secondary to participation, and the idea that the centralized state is the only way of organizing power is questioned' (Motta 2011a: 42). Latin American journalist Benjamin Dangl (2010: 10) takes this a step further and observes that 'while many South American governments seek autonomy from Washington, social movements in various countries seek a different kind of autonomy from the states themselves.'

In fact, Henri Lefebvre (2009) envisions true (socialist) popular power as that which withers away the state and liberates people from state domination. Not using the term 'popular power', Lefebvre calls for '*autogestion*' and in doing so invokes many of the principles of popular power already mentioned. It is worth citing him at length.

*Autogestion*, far from being established once and for all, is itself the site and the stake of struggle... Each time a social group (generally the productive workers) refuses to accept passively its conditions of existence, of life, or of survival, each time such a group forces itself not only to understand but to master its own conditions of existence, *autogestion* is occurring. This broad but precise definition shows *autogestion* to be highly diversified practice that concerns businesses as well as territorial units, cities, and regions. This definition also includes all aspects of social life; it implies the strengthening of all associative ties, that is to say, of civil society. This theoretical definition points toward a practical struggle that is always reborn with failures and setbacks. Above all, this definition points to the fundamentally antistatist tendency of *autogestion*, the only efficient and active form of the famous

'counterpowers'. ...This does not happen without real struggles. *Autogestion* must continually be enacted. The same is true of democracy, which is never a 'condition' but a struggle.

The concept of *autogestion* does not provide a model, does not trace a line. It points to a way, and thus to a strategy. This strategy must exclude maneuvers and manipulations that render practice illusory; this strategy must therefore prevent the monopolization of the word and the concept by institutions that transform them into fiction. In addition, the strategy must concretize *autogestion* and extend it to all levels and sectors. The perpetual struggle for *autogestion* is the class struggle (Lefebvre 2009: 134-5, emphases in original).

This understanding of popular power sits awkwardly alongside the view that popular power can be embodied in organizations that have been promoted and maintained by the state, as is the case in Venezuela (García-Guadilla 2008; Gómez Calcaño & Martín 2008). Specifically, the Bolivarian Revolution has involved the emergence of a plethora of potential 'people's SpaceTimes', such as the Bolivarian Circles, the Urban Land Committees, or more significant in recent years the Community Councils (Hawkins & Hansen 2006; Irazábal & Foley 2010; Martínez et al 2010: 3). The latter has been designated by the Chávez government as the 'engine' of popular power in the country (García-Guadilla 2008: 10; Marcelo, CTU activist, Anzoátegui State, personal interview, 29 May 2010). Thus, what we often see in state-promoted Venezuelan discourse is an emphasis on the 'embodiment' of popular power in the form of these various organizations. Research that examines such claims often questions whether or not popular power is being achieved through this institutionalization of popular

organizations. Most often, what they find is a mixed experience with a tendency for these popular organizations to be reduced to solving technical problems in the local communities (Garcia-Guadilla 2006, 2008); develop a clientelist relationship with the state (ibid.; Irazábal & Foley 2010; López Maya 2004); act as electoral engines of the Chávez regime (Hawkins & Hansen 2006); or disintegrate altogether (ibid.; Irazábal & Foley 2010). According to this research, these organizations seem to fall short of Fals Borda's view of what is possible in a 'people's SpaceTime' or Lefebvre's aspiration for *autogestión*.

In fact, many Venezuelan activists make the distinction between popular power promoted and facilitated by the state – which is still trapped in the logic of state institutions – and that *de la base* (from the base). Put simply, 'There is a power from the people and a power of the state' (Ana, Pobladores Movement activist, Caracas, personal interview, 27 May 2010). Michael Neocosmos (2006: 65-7) further argues that true popular power does not need recognition from the state to be considered legitimate. Rather, its legitimacy comes from the people themselves, those whose practices constitute the active making of such forms of politics. While this view does not discount that popular power is often institutionalized in a variety of ways, such as officially recognized popular organizations or as autonomous movements, it also brings to focus where the true locus of power must reside for popular power to be possible – regardless of the original impetus for organization.

Even research that assumes a broader view of popular power initiatives, taking into consideration the variety of autonomous popular movements that were not begun by the government or those, like the CTUs, that have transformed themselves into autonomous movements, expresses concern with regard to the development of popular power and the

encroaching imposition of the state bureaucracy and *Chavismo*<sup>3</sup> (see Denis 2003, 2006, 2008; Martínez et al 2010; Motta 2009, 2011a, 2011b; Fernandes 2011b; Spronk & Webber 2011). What some of this research does, however, is emphasize that popular power is an evolving, contested process, and that while the state plays a significant role in creating limits and opportunities for this power to be constructed, it is not 'up to' the state to make it happen. This research recognizes that the 'revolution within the revolution', that is the pro-revolution critique and resistance of the state, is alive and growing in Venezuela (Martínez et al 2010: 7). As such, the struggle between state institutional power and the construction of popular power continues to be an important innovation and contradiction in the Bolivarian Revolution.

Certainly one should be careful to not elevate the idea of popular power to a panacea for Venezuela's multiple problems. Margaret Canovan (1999: 13) cautions that for those who appeal to popular power as the solution to deepening democracy 'there is a strain of romanticism here, invoking the living voice of the people and their spontaneous action.' While I take issue with Canovan's assessment which says that calls for direct democracy are attributable to populist discourse (thereby failing to recognize that this outcry amounts to a legitimate, substantive critique of material conditions and certain forms of democracy<sup>4</sup> such as emerged in Latin America after the devastating effects of neoliberal policies)<sup>5</sup> her concern is valid in as much as analyses of popular power (whether positive or negative) neglect to consider that *power (of any kind) is actively constructed through concrete political practices and cannot be decreed nor is spontaneous*. The point here is to think of popular power, not

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<sup>3</sup> I understand *Chavismo* as the mobilized politics in support of the Chávez government, associated with the personality of Chávez and distinct from the work towards Twenty-First Century Socialism or the Bolivarian Revolution, though often those boundaries and motivations are blurred.

<sup>4</sup> For an analysis and critique of how these same liberal democratic assumptions mask struggles of popular classes and instead reduce the Venezuelan Bolivarian Revolution to Chávez-centered 'populism', see Motta 2011a.

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 1.

just as an organizational form, but as a process.

Antonio Gramsci's (1971) insight into the nature of power can help in this regard. Though Gramsci's work is largely focused on the character of the state and the struggle for hegemony, his examination of these areas offers several suggestions as to the nature of power more generally. First, Gramsci's analysis of Italian and European politics in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* demonstrates that hegemony is a constant process of construction, utilizing the strategies of coercion and consent. In the words of Adam Morton (2007: 97), Gramsci recognizes that 'the relationship [of hegemony] is constantly constructed and contested and is never a static reflection of an alliance of social class forces' (see also Hart 2002: 26).

Furthermore, Gramsci places emphasis on the strategy of consent in the construction of hegemony arguing that 'the State is the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules...' (Gramsci 1971: 504). As Gillian Hart (2002: 27-28) points out, for Gramsci these activities are not limited to the economic realm nor even the realm of the state ('political society'). Rather, Gramsci (1971: 212) insists on the importance of cultural struggle – what he calls the exercise of 'leadership' that is not predicated on governmental power – for the construction of hegemony. Hence,

while material conditions and economic power relations define broad conditions of existence, they do not in any unilateral and automatic fashion guarantee the specific forms of ongoing material/cultural struggles or the formation of political identities. Emphasizing Marxism as a theory of praxis,



Gramsci and his followers thus opened the way for understanding politics as *process*, encompassing not only formal electoral politics but also pervading the multiple arenas of everyday life (Hart 2002: 28, emphasis in original).

Thus, 'by going beyond a theory of the state-as-force and expanding on conventional notions of the intellectual, the struggle over hegemony revolves around shaping intersubjective forms of consciousness in civil society' (Morton 2007: 93). Within Gramsci's framework the process of constructing power takes on new meaning that goes beyond the institutionalization of power, e.g. through the state or organizations, and involves a variety of terrains, including that of everyday subjectivities.

While many have used Gramsci's insights in order to understand the complex process of constructing hegemonic power 'in the politics of everyday Life' (Ekers & Loftus 2008: 704; see also Morrow & Torres 2001; López Maya 2004) or, conversely, to point out the fragility of what are seemingly powerful hegemonic systems (Hart 2002), I want to extend Gramsci's theorization to other forms of power. Like hegemonic power, popular power is an active process of constructing new political subjectivities of the popular classes. The struggle is one that is not simply economic, nor even institutional (the state), but is also waged through the cultural terrain. This is crucially important for our engagement with questions of popular power. While popular subjects may not have much access to political or economic resources, their cultural and social reproduction (Motta 2011a) form critical areas from which to construct power.<sup>6</sup>

This process-oriented approach sees the construction of popular power as a struggle

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<sup>6</sup> This will be discussed in more detail in the Venezuelan context in Chapters 3 and 4.

involving social relations across society. In this sense, popular power is not only understood in terms of the struggle for/against/beyond state power but also involves new forms of being and acting with each other (Motta 2011b: 189) – between popular subjects and across social classes. Reiterating Motta (2011a: 42), ‘practice is therefore not only an attempt to ameliorate their social conditions within dominant structures of power but an effort to rethink and remake the forms in which power is exercised’ (Motta 2011a: 42). In this way, too, power may be exercised and constructed in the everyday, not just in formal political spheres (Fernandes, S. 2007: 99).

Thus we must also consider how popular power ‘emerges from reconstituting social relations’ (Chatterton 2005: 553).<sup>7</sup> Social relations are not only reconstituted between popular subjects, e.g. in the struggle for collective identity and articulation, but the construction of popular power, in the ways that have been described above, requires the remaking of social relations throughout society. As such, Gramsci’s view of (hegemonic) power as process also confronts another problem with the ‘institutional view’ of popular power – that power is not simply ‘given’. In other words, popular power does not just come into being, nor is it decreed into existence. It is struggled over because it requires a change in social relations. For Denis (2006), this is precisely what makes popular power a ‘counter-hegemonic’ struggle. As Leal (2007: 545, emphasis added) argues

genuine empowerment is about poor people seizing and constructing popular power through their own praxis. It is not handed down from the powerful to the powerless, as institutional development has conveniently chosen to interpret the concept. *Those who give power condition it, for, as*

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<sup>7</sup> Chatterton (2005: 553) adds that this is done ‘through ideas of equality, justice and popular education.’

Paulo Freire (1970) best put it himself: 'Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift.'

As discussed above, this point is all-too obvious in analyses of popular organizations in Venezuela. Countless research has recognized the unevenness of success, if not downright failure, of popular organizations in obtaining self-governance, direct democracy, or control over their territories. As Denis (2008) points out, 'power then is not the efficiency that a predetermined action plan could have based on the "taking of power" and from there learning how to transition to a socialist paradise, or whatever they call it; power is the force that we give ourselves in the development of a politics, in a history, in a circumstance.' While the construction of popular power might benefit from forms of state support, or at least lack of state repression, ultimately it requires that popular subjects are the collective source of their own liberation from social, economic and political domination, beyond the mediation of political elites or the state (see Wilpert 2007: 66-9; Kane 2001: 12).

The recognition that popular power is a process of construction allows us to go beyond the questions of whether or not institutionalized popular organizations embody the power of the masses, or even whether a revolutionary state creates popular power. It suggests instead that we should look more closely at the variety of economic, political and cultural strategies that these organizations engage in (that will, of course, vary from place to place, see below) and the outcome of those strategies over time (for 'liberation does not come about all at once' [Gibson 2006: 35]).

With this in mind, Lefebvre's idea of *autogestión* (the Spanish word) as a continuous political strategy will be used in this thesis to denote the CTU strategies that are virtually

independent of state institutions and/or that seek to act as a 'counterpower' and contribute to the withering of the state. In the words of Brenner and Elden (2009: 16-7, emphasis added)

Lefebvre promotes *autogestión* less as a fully formed postcapitalist institutional framework than as *a political orientation* through which various sectors of social life... might be subjected to new forms of decentralized, grassroots democratic political control through the very social actors who are most immediately attached to them.

Whereas, *cogestión*, something that Lefebvre was extremely critical of, will be used to indicate strategies with a political orientation towards some kind of partnership with the state. The purpose of making a distinction between types of strategies is to highlight the complex reality that popular organizations face in the Bolivarian Revolution. While recognizing that popular power involves the remaking of social relations and at times acts as 'counterpower' to the state, it will become clear in this thesis that the CTU movement utilizes both *autogestión* and *cogestión* and that both strategies can contribute to the construction of popular power even while presenting distinct opportunities and limits.<sup>8</sup>

Importantly, the construction of popular power is inherently spatial. This is one of the key points I want to make in this project and will be the topic of discussion in the next sections. I mean this in two ways. First, the distinct historical geographies of the state, capital and the barrio communities have a significant impact on how popular power is conceived of and struggled over in different places. For example, the history of the CTUs and the opportunities

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<sup>8</sup> The identification of dual *autogestión* and *cogestión* strategies in the CTU movement is not my own deduction but is an explicit political orientation in the movement, though specific practices and strategies are not often discussed in such a taxonomy.

and difficulties they face from the scale of an individual CTU to the national scale of the movement reflect what I will refer to as uneven geographies. Recognizing that this is the case will help us to see the multiple dimensions of struggle that popular actors in Venezuela are confronting, including the challenges related to articulating a social movement at a national scale or one that bridges class differences, as the Pobladores Movement is attempting to do. Such a spatial view will also help us to recognize the state as a collection of multiple institutions, grounded in distinct historical geographies of place, and exercising different kinds of influence at various scales.

Second, the strategies that popular organizations utilize in the construction of popular power involve the transformation of the space with<sup>9</sup> which popular organizations and movements act. After an initial visit to Venezuela in 2008, it quickly became clear to me that the development or constitution of popular power is as much about organized people in the form of social movements or community organizations (as Chávez is often encouraging) as it is about the transformation of *socio-spatial* relations that are immediately evident in the form of socio-spatial segregation in every major city across the country. Engagement with the CTUs and examination of their strategies reveals how the construction of popular power is *necessarily connected* to the transformation of these socio-spatial relations and thus to the transformation of urban space.

## **THE SPATIALITY OF SOCIAL RELATIONS: A CRITICAL CONCEPT OF SPACE**

Since the 1970s to the present moment, the social sciences have undergone what has

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<sup>9</sup> The use of 'with', instead of 'in', is intentional and will be made more clear in the discussion of a critical concept of space, below.

recently been called the 'spatial turn' (Unwin 2000). That is to say, the concept of 'space' has gradually begun to inform many of the fields of social science research (for the moment let's consider space to be the physical world that we inhabit, ranging in scale from the body to the whole universe). Pioneered by the likes of David Harvey, Henri Lefebvre, Doreen Massey, Neil Brenner, Neil Smith, Edward Soja, Saskia Sassen and others, the idea of space as an object of theoretical analysis has migrated from its 'natural' place in geography to sociology, anthropology, political economy, history, and even psychology (Escobar 2001; Hart 2002: 35; Hubbard et al 2004; Slater 1997: 258; Soja 2000).

While proliferating through the social sciences, 'space' of course does not mean the same thing to everyone, and in fact it is characterized in radically different ways for different purposes (Massey 1994: 249). The concept of space used here is what I will call a 'critical concept of space', which primarily draws from the works of various Marxist geographers. This is an understanding of space which argues that 'space' is not simply a static box into which things – humans, buildings, trees, etc. – are put (Lefebvre 1991/1974: 91). Rather, space must be understood as 'a set of relations between things' (ibid: 83).<sup>10</sup>

In his work, Lefebvre draws on Marx's critique of traditional political economy studies to launch a similar critique about the typical treatment of space, where the study of the product (space) obscures the *social relations of production* (the production of space). Lefebvre argues that for critical social science, the production process (of space), not just the objects (in space), should be the object of study (Lefebvre 1991/1974: 98). He argues that 'a social space is constituted neither by a collection of things or an aggregate of (sensory) data, not

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<sup>10</sup> Critical of academic institutions as complicit in obscuring the (social) production of (social) space, Lefebvre argues that this relational study of space would require social scientists to abandon disciplinary divisions, which chop up space into discreet pieces, and to embrace an altogether different methodology of research.

by a void packed like a parcel with various contents...' (ibid: 27). Instead, space only exists because there are social relations to create it (ibid.: 83). Extrapolating from this initial premise, Lefebvre goes on to argue that this means that different social relations create different kinds of space, and since social relations are always changing, space too is always changing. In this formulation, spatial relations and space are inextricably interrelated.

Massey (1994: 254) points out that space defined as a social relation was a readily accepted idea before Lefebvre's work, but often resulted in a one-sided 'formulation [that] implied that geographical forms and distributions were simply outcomes, the endpoint of social explanation.' Lefebvre's exceptional turn is to point out that space and social relations are produced through a mutually constitutive relationship in which space is produced through human actions or practices, according to the needs and interests of each actor, *while at the same time space itself limits or encourages other actions* (Lefebvre 1991/1974: 73). Space 'serves as a tool of thought and action' for those who would make use of it (*ibid.* 26). Along with Massey (1984), Lefebvre (1991/1974) was one of the first theorists to emphatically emphasize the importance of the dialectic between space and social relations (Merrifield 1993: 517; Soja 2000). In short, 'spatial form can alter the future course of the very histories which have produced it' (Massey 1994: 268; see also Painter 1995: 21; Merrifield 1993: 521; Gottdiener 1993: 132). In an obvious sense, this means that the social relations in the Australian Outback are different than in the Himalayas, by the simple fact that their physical geographies are distinct. In a more nuanced sense, this means that the accumulated histories of social relations (including the state, economy, and social actors of all kinds) that have produced a certain kind of 'space' are in turn shaped and their actions are limited by that space. These accumulated spatial differences are what Gillian Hart (2002) has referred to as 'historical geographies' and what I will call for the remainder of the thesis 'uneven

geographies' in order to emphasize both the differences and the power relations inscribed through these geographies (see below).

Lefebvre's dialectical approach between space and social relations puts into motion the idea of a constantly producing and changing social space in which social agents of any kind, albeit constrained, are by their very actions part of a dynamic production process, that '[t]he spatial organization of human society is an evolving product of human action' (Soja 1980: 210; see also Lake 2006; Merrifield 1993: 520). For Lefebvre, this critical concept of space is the basis for an examination of the totality of space, what he calls 'social space'. Social space includes nature (e.g. land and resources, above and below ground), relationships mediated by territory (e.g. the state), the built environment, economic production, cultural and political human interactions, familial and gendered relations, knowledge, and importantly the body (Shields 1992: 50-1; Farrar 2000: 5; Merrifield 1993: 524).

For critical spatial theorists this understanding of space as living and productive is a response to the view that 'time' is the only dynamic element of social relations, while space is either neglected entirely or conceived as stasis, a perspective that has informed and continues to inform much of social science research despite the 'spatial turn'. Massey (2005: 62-71, 81-89) points out that this treatment of space is most evident in research and discourse about modernity and globalization. The limits to a time-as-movement-space-as-static view are principally related to questions of power, for unequal power relations are played out through space where space is an object, an instrument, or a producer of struggle. This is not an argument to subordinate time to space or to suggest that they are equivalent.



Both space and time are necessary to capture the complexity of social relations.<sup>11</sup>

Rather, this is an argument that calls for us to recognize that space itself is political. Lefebvre's insistence that social relations produce dynamic space is premised on an understanding of the 'inextricable intertwining of the production of space and the production of power' (Leitner & Miller 2007: 119). As Massey (1994: 3) has argued, 'since social relations are inevitably and everywhere imbued with power and meaning and symbolism, this view of the spatial [as a configuration of social relations] is an ever-shifting social geometry of power and signification', 'a complex web of relations of domination and subordination, of solidarity and co-operation' (ibid.: 265; see also Leitner & Miller 2007).<sup>12</sup> We have only to consider on the one hand the socio-spatial segregation of a city like Caracas (Bolívar et al 2000; Roberts 2005; Mago de Chipote 1986), and on the other, the collective struggles seeking to appropriate<sup>13</sup> this urban space, to realize how power is inscribed in and through space. Recognizing that space is a tool and product of struggles for power (whether that be hegemonic or popular) is critically important in our analysis of urban popular movements and the transformation of urban space.

Hence, a critical concept of space provides *a framework through which to examine the relationship between the production of urban space, or cities, and the struggle for popular power as one of mutual constitution*. This approach is significant for several reasons. First, it is the contention of this research project that urban space itself is the object of struggle of urban popular movements. This involves manifold struggles over who has access to space and where, what that space looks like, how it is produced, on what terms and by whom, who

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<sup>11</sup> As such, Massey (1994: 2, 261) argues that we should strive to think not just in terms of time or space, but we must hold the two together in a dynamic tension of 'space-time'.

<sup>12</sup> Elsewhere, Massey (1998, 2003, 2005) has referred to the way that power moves in and through space and place as 'power-geometry.' See below.

<sup>13</sup> The term appropriation used here has a specific meaning that will be explained in Chapter 6.

regulates that space, and who decides. Recalling the words of the CTU movement, above, the desire is for the city to be organized by popular power where *el pueblo* is 'controlling all the processes that constitute collective life' ('Sólo habrá socialismo si hay poder popular'). Similarly, more than 35 years ago, Lefebvre (1991/1974: 410-1) recognized that

space is becoming the principal stake of goal-directed action and struggles... it has now become something more than the theatre, the disinterested stage or setting, of action... space can no longer be looked upon as an "essence", as an object distinct from the point of view of (or as compared with) a result or resultant, as an empirically verifiable effect of a past, a history or a society. Is space indeed a medium? A milieu? An intermediary? It is doubtless all of these, but its role is less and less neutral, more and more active, both as instruments and as goal, as means and as end.

Andy Merrifield (2005: 702) specifies that urban space is particularly important in this struggle. 'The urban scale is the key mediator on the global scene, at once the stake and terrain of social struggle, both launch pad and lynchpin in history' (see also Lefebvre 1968, 1970; Smith 2003; Soja 2010). As a means of struggle space also imposes certain limits and opportunities on urban actors.

Second, a critical concept of space brings popular subjects to the forefront of analysis in a way that allows us to see them as co-producers of urban space, albeit operating under radically unequal power relations. This is so precisely because a critical concept of space allows that *all* social relations are involved in this dialectic with (urban) space, even if extreme

power differentials are involved. Here again we are able to link the practices of popular movements and their efforts to re-make social relations with the transformation of urban space. How barrio dwellers contribute to the production of urban space seems to be a necessary practicality that cannot be limited to how they produce 'barrios' as a distinct category from 'the city', as is often the case of more traditional, a-spatial studies of barrios (see Carolini 2005; UN HABITAT 2003; Trigo 2004). Rather, we must consider how they contribute to the production/transformation of the urban as a spatial totality and the implications that this has for social relations.

Third, a critical concept of space helps us to disrupt the dichotomies often assumed between city and barrio (Trigo 2004),<sup>14</sup> or between global and local, that mystify how places are produced through social struggles which occur at multiple spatial scales and that attribute a smooth, deterministic quality to 'forces' such as globalization or the state (Hart 2002), relegating the dispossessed or subaltern to powerless positions of 'victim' or 'socially excluded' (Du Toit 2004). While keeping unequal power relations – particularly those involving the state – at the forefront of this study, a framework that involves a critical concept of space also allows us to see how places, and thus popular power, are produced differently, e.g. unevenly (Massey 1994; Soja 1980; Smith 1984), and that places – whether they are occupied by barrio-dwellers or Wall Street executives – are implicated in the constitution of larger spatial scales (Hart 2002), e.g. the scale of the urban, Latin America, or the global economy. In this way, a theoretical strategy of seeing the construction of popular power as spatial illuminates how the strategies of popular movements are involved in the

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<sup>14</sup> This idea has even been repeated to me by a CTU activist, and we have had a disagreement on this point. While I understand the need to emphasize the extreme difference in conditions between upper-class neighborhoods and the barrios, and I recognize and appreciate the different lived experiences in each, I hope to demonstrate the political consequences of thinking in terms of dichotomies rather than in terms of social relations and power, even if the social relations are made explicit through socio-spatial segregation.

transformation of the urban and in the reworking of social relations across society.

## **MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS OF SPACE**

I would like to make the relationship between power struggles and the transformation of urban space as clear as possible, emphasizing the strategies involved in constructing popular power. To do this I am again drawing on the work of Henri Lefebvre. I am choosing to focus on Lefebvre's theoretical concepts that offer a particularly spatialized view of power and the political. For this research project the most important of these are the concepts of 'lived space' and the 'right to the city', as they help make the connection between popular power construction and the transformation of urban space. The 'right to the city', which is a particular take on the exercise of popular power in the city, has already been discussed in Chapter 1 and will be explored further in Chapter 6. 'Lived space' will be discussed in this section and expanded on in Chapter 5. As the relationship between the CTUs and the Venezuelan state is a theme that traverses the thesis and presents different opportunities and limits to the transformation of urban space, this section will also highlight the theoretical role of the state in producing space. On this subject, Lefebvre is highly critical of the state, as is evident in his advocacy of *autogestión*.

To begin with, Lefebvre's 'lived space' concept comes from what Shields (1992, 1998) has called the 'unifying threefold dialectic of space', that is, a three-part concept of space consisting of 1) material space, specifically the *physical* relationship between things, 2) the abstract *idea* of space, and 3) the bodily *experience* of space. These multiple dimensions of space are premised on different kinds of knowledges upon which different social actors base their struggles. Importantly, these are not discreet 'areas' of space but mutually constituting

dimensions that comprise all of social space.

*Spatial practice, or 'perceived' (material) space.* The first dimension is material space that is produced by and allows the ongoing 'production of social relations' (Shields 1992: 50). 'This involves the range of activities from individual routines to the creation of zones and regions for specific purposes' (ibid.: 52), such as houses, the workplace, roads, parks, etc. This is the space of daily human activity that '[corresponds] to a specific use' (Lefebvre 1991/1974: 16) and, as a result, creates a cohesive society (ibid.: 33). For example, each day I go to work from an apartment to an office building via a highway. I expect the activities of these spaces to 'express and constitute' (ibid.: 16) certain 'spatial practices', such as sleeping, working, and driving, respectively. In short, 'perceived space' is the physical space that we build and routinely move through that is 'empirically observable' (ibid.: 413). Different places produce different spatial practices and vice versa, and according to Lefebvre (1991/1974), each society has a distinct and dominant spatial practice that changes over time.

Spatial practice, however, may not logically relate to the needs of society (Lefebvre 1991/1974: 38) – or to the needs of certain sectors of society – and, therefore, is always at risk of disruption (Shields 1992: 53). For example, in the 1990s in the city of San Francisco, California a low-income community decided that neighborhood children did not have any green space to play in. So to make their point known they constructed a basketball court in the middle of a large intersection, stopping traffic that carried suburban commuters to downtown office buildings and disrupting the spatial practice of the street (personal interview, October 2005). Such spatial practices are also evident in the barrios of Venezuela and are open to disruption and even transformation, as will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Representations of space, or 'conceived' (mental) space. The second dimension of space is produced by ideas about space, ranging from a simple map of a city to ideas about how the urban should be (Soja 2000). Representations of space is the space of certain kinds of abstract knowledges (*saber*) (Lefebvre 1991/1974: 41) and often is appropriated by hegemonic ideologies. Lefebvre argues that 'this is the dominant space in any society' (ibid.: 38-9). Though also a contested ground, it is largely focused on maximizing the mode of production (capitalism) and reproduction and, as such, is the realm of 'experts', 'all of whom identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived' (ibid.: 38). In other words, the variety and differences found in perceived space (above) and lived space (below), are often reduced by dominant forces to the realm of conceived space where, as James Scott (1998) argues, efficiency, control, and capital accumulation are the goals. The state and capital utilize representations of space and the knowledge associated with it to produce hegemony (in the Gramscian sense of the word).

Representational space, or 'lived' space. The third dimension is 'space that is directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of "inhabitants" and "users"' (Lefebvre 1991/1974: 39). Representational space 'embraces the loci of passion of action and of lived situations... it is essentially qualitative, fluid and dynamic' (ibid.: 42). Knowledge in this space comes from the historical experience of a people and of individuals (ibid.: 41). This is knowledge (*conocer*) that is produced by human experience, such as love, labor, and creation. As a result, it is diverse and contradictory. Thus, Soja (2000: 11-12) points out that lived space can only be understood through the careful examination of the lives of people, and even then no one's experience can be fully known (in the 'conceived space' sense of the word). As will be discussed in a moment, it is precisely this non-capturable production of difference that makes 'lived space' potentially revolutionary, and it is most

often this space that dispossessed residents can utilize in their struggle for urban transformation.

To fully understand the distinctions that Lefebvre is trying to make, particularly between 'conceived' space and 'lived' space, we must examine the kinds of knowledges that are at play in the production of these spaces. To this end, the work of James Scott in *Seeing Like a State* (1998) is also helpful to clarify the power implicated in different kinds of knowledges. To begin with, Lefebvre mentions two kinds of knowledge: *savoir/saber* and *connaître/conocer* that correspond to 'conceived' space and 'lived' space, respectively. *Saber* refers to knowledge that can be gathered as data, through books or study; it is information that can be mass-produced and disseminated. It is abstract knowledge that uses signs (e.g. numbers and letters) as its mode of dissemination and learning. *Conocer*, on the other hand, is knowledge that is learned through the body. It is personal, lived experience, whether that be daily living or exceptional events, that is represented symbolically (e.g. art).

Hence, to know who someone is (*saber*) because you have read about them or heard about them is different than to know them (*conocer*) personally because you are friends. In another illustration, the difference between 'to know' (*saber*) and 'to know' (*conocer*) might be explained as the difference between reading a tube map and actually making a trip on the tube. If you have read a London tube map you 'know' (*saber*) how to get from King's Cross Station to Charing Cross Station, and when you actually make the trip you 'know' it (*conocer*) in a different way, by its smells, what it looks like, where the entrances and exits are, and what it feels like to you. And if you travel that path often enough you might learn its secrets, such as which car is least crowded, how long the trip takes depending on weather conditions or day of the week, which exit you prefer, etc. These are the distinct knowledges that

produce conceived space and lived space.

Lefebvre conceptualizes these dimensions of space and knowledge, not as separate, but as interconnected (Lefebvre 2009: 198-9). They

contribute in different ways to the production of space according to their qualities and attributes, according to the society or mode of production in question, and according to the historical period. Relations between the three moments of the perceived, the conceived and the lived are never either simple or stable... (Lefebvre 1991/1974: 46).

Hence, returning to our example above, some of the knowledge (*conocer*) about riding the tube might be able to be translated into *saber* (through a guide book or by giving directions to a tourist), but that knowledge then gets 'lived' and produces another kind of *conocer*. These knowledges in turn create new 'perceived' (material) space, and on and on.

## **THE REVOLUTIONARY POTENTIAL OF LIVED SPACE: THE 'REVOLUTION IN THE REVOLUTION'**

Such a threefold conceptualization of space provides a framework with which to recognize and engage a variety of strategies related to the construction of popular power that contribute to the transformation of urban space. That is to say, we can look for strategies that take place along the dimensions of the perceived, the conceived, and the lived. Such an approach helps to both recognize popular power struggles as concrete, strategic practices that involve material, ideational and relational activities, and to connect these practices to



the wider realms of the production and transformation of urban space.

While Lefebvre argues that these three 'moments' of space are inextricably intertwined, he also makes it clear that different actors utilize and produce different kinds of space for different purposes and with different degrees of power. As will become clear through the course of this thesis, the focus of this research project is on political strategies that are premised on the experiences of lived space, but that of course involve the other spatial moments. This is in part because lived space and the knowledge that it involves, is one of the primary resources upon which popular movements, such as the Urban Land Committees, can draw from in their quest to transform the city.

The essential importance of lived space, as both a tool and a product in the production of alternative forms of power and alternative urban space, becomes clear in relation to Lefebvre's argument that social space is dominated by the state and capital. According to Lefebvre (2003/1970), capital requires the production of certain kinds of space in order to survive and works with the state to produce such space. Thus 'the state represents *the* link between the survival of capitalism and the production of space' (Brenner & Elden 2009: 26, emphasis in original). The state then is not an apparatus but a set of processes: 'its materiality resides much less in institutions than in the reworking of processes and relations of power so as to create new spaces for the deployment of power' (Trouillot 2003: 83-4).

Hence, Lefebvre (1991/1974) argues that our present era is characterized by the production of what he calls 'abstract space'<sup>15</sup> – the deployment of conceived space, as a tool to

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<sup>15</sup> It is important to note that this refers to a periodized understanding of space. According to Lefebvre, all societies produce space according to their mode of production (Lefebvre 2009: 230-4). That means that while total 'social space' is still the outcome of the 'threefold dialectic' between perceived, conceived, and lived space, over time the content and relationship between these spaces change,

accumulate capital and dominate society. For Lefebvre, the role of the state and capital in producing abstract space is clear: 'abstract space is buttressed by non-critical (positive) knowledge [*saber*], backed up by a frightening capacity for violence, and maintained by a bureaucracy which has laid hold of the gains of capitalism in the ascendant and turned them to its own profit...' (ibid.: 52).

Under the historical period of abstract space, space itself has become a 'means of control, and hence of domination, of power' (ibid.: 26; 2009: 202). Playing a critical role in this process, state institutions move toward the 'capture', homogenization, and fracture of all social space for the benefit of capital accumulation (Lefebvre 2003/1970: 79-80, 101; 2009: 227). The exercise of control over space for the benefits of capital has culminated in the modern city and the extension of urban space across all geographies. 'In this [abstract] space, the cradle of accumulation, the place of richness, the subject of history, the center of historical space – in other words, the city – has exploded' (Lefebvre 2009: 187).

Utilizing Gramsci's concept of 'hegemony' in which the ruling class seeks to maintain its power via culture, knowledge, and 'human mediation' (e.g. political parties and so-called experts) (Lefebvre 1991/1974: 10), Lefebvre recognizes that 'state intervention does not just occur episodically or at specific points but incessantly, by means of diverse organizations and institutions devoted to the management and production of space' at the level of everyday life (Lefebvre 2009: 227).

Importantly, this process of capture and homogenization utilizes a certain kind of knowledge [*saber*] which penetrates the everyday, trying to reduce lived space (and thus, difference) to

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thereby creating a new 'social space'. Lefebvre, thus names different historical 'social spaces'. In *The Production of Space* (1991/1974) he refers to current social space as 'abstract space'.

the more controllable conceived space (Lefebvre 1991/1974: 52). In practical terms we see this most often, though subtly, in the form of urban planning, where 'experts' organize and code material space according to an abstract idea about space (and according to the needs of capital), making certain forms of living or inhabiting space no longer possible, or even illegal (Scott 1998). Capture, homogenization, and fracture of social space happen because the bureaucracy of the state imbues and enforces the (moral) value of conceived space (Trouillot 2003: 89-90), equating 'what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived' (Lefebvre 1991/1974: 38).<sup>16</sup> In more colorful terms, Lefebvre declares that these state processes 'grind down and crush everything before them' (ibid.: 285). In the process, the state manages to promote itself as 'the stable centre... of (national) societies and spaces' (ibid.: 23). The state's most insidious accomplishment is to declare itself as 'the only space' and to claim 'transparency' and 'objectivity' (ibid.: 51) all the while controlling and exploiting society (Lefebvre 2003/1970: 101; Trouillot 2003: 82).<sup>17</sup> Colonized by this type of knowledge and the social relations it produces, everyday life becomes one of alienation (Aronowitz 2007).

Lefebvre is not the only one to make the association and distinction between different kinds of spaces and knowledges and the exercise of power through them. For example, anthropologists Lomnitz and Diaz (1992: 180) make a similar distinction in regards to Latin American cities between what they call the 'formal sphere' (perceived space), which is derived from 'bureaucratized rules of conduct devised from universal postulates [conceived space] to make uniform and perpetuate society,' and the 'informal sphere' (lived space), 'a

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<sup>16</sup> One of the illustrations Lefebvre offers of this domination is the imposition of the European physical, social and economic structure on Latin America during the period of colonization (Lefebvre 1991/1974: 151).

<sup>17</sup> Lefebvre points to the social sciences and their focus on the state as an example of how the state has claimed the center. 'Together, the social sciences – sociology, history, political economy – are in a relation of perpetual interaction with the State and understanding of the State' (Lefebvre 2009: 53).

range of activities and social relationships derived from cultural codes...' The point of their argument is not to say that they are pure spheres/spaces but to suggest that there is a distinction to their underlying logic and the priorities they insist upon, yet each sphere modifies the other, creating new logics and spaces of interaction.

James Scott's (1998) work perhaps best compliments Lefebvre's ideas of space and knowledges, as well as reflecting a similar concern about the state's interest in homogenizing, fracturing and controlling space. For Scott, the main concern is not that the state uses *saber*, what he refers to as 'bureaucratic planning' and 'high-modernist ideology', but that this 'hegemonic planning mentality... excludes the necessary role of local knowledge and know-how' (ibid.: 6). Corresponding to *conocer*, he uses the Greek term 'mētis' to describe the local knowledge that he is talking about, the 'wide array of practical skills and acquired intelligence in responding to constantly changing natural and human environment' (ibid.: 313). Like Lefebvre, Scott contrasts mētis with universal knowledges or 'techne', which 'can be readily assembled, comprehensively documented, and formally taught, but they cannot by themselves add to that knowledge or explain how it came into being' (ibid.: 320). Throughout *Seeing Like a State* (1998) Scott highlights examples of how 'techne' has shaped space, whether nature or the city, in the state's attempt to control and make 'legible' local knowledges.

Scott's work also emphasizes the importance of recognizing how power works through these knowledges, for the problem is not scientific knowledge *per se*, it is the imperialism of such knowledge.

The destruction of mētis and its replacement by standardized formulas

legible only from the center is virtually inscribed in the activities of both the state and large-scale bureaucratic capitalism. As a 'project,' it is the object of constant initiatives which are never entirely successful, for no forms of production or social life can be made to work by formulas alone – that is, without *mētis*. *The logic animating the project, however, is one of control and appropriation*. Local knowledge, because it is dispersed and relatively autonomous, is all but unappropriable. The *reduction or, more utopian still, the elimination of mētis and the local control it entails are preconditions, in the case of the state, of administrative order and fiscal appropriation and, in the case of the large capitalist firm, of worker discipline and profit* (ibid.: 335, emphasis added).

Importantly, however, both Lefebvre and Scott argue that social space can never be fully captured/controlled/appropriated. *Conocer* is not a form of knowledge that is recognized as equal to *saber* by dominant, 'conceived' space because it cannot be fully abstracted and used to organize and regulate society (Lefebvre 1991/1974: 38-9). Yet it is precisely for this reason that lived space has revolutionary potential, for it is the unique experience of each individual, never fully 'knowable', and therefore cannot be simply reduced to an abstraction (Soja 2000: 12; Scott 1998). While the state and capital attempt to capture, homogenize, and fracture social space, they are never able to fully do this because new space is always being produced and falls outside of the logics of conceived space (Lefebvre 1991/1974: 23, 26, 349; Gottdiener 1993: 131; see also Massey 2005: 100). This is particularly the case in the city. In a discussion about Jane Jacobs's (1961) work on cities, Scott (1998: 143) reflects that

how a city develops is something like how a language evolves. A language is

the joint historical creation of millions of speakers. Although all speakers have some effect on the trajectory of a language, the process is not particularly egalitarian. Linguists, grammarians, and educators, some of them backed by the power of the state, weigh in heavily. But the process is not particularly amenable to a dictatorship, either. Despite the efforts toward "central planning," language (especially its everyday spoken form) stubbornly tends to go on its own rich, multivalent, colorful way. Similarly, despite the attempts by urban planners toward designing and stabilizing the city, it escapes their grasp; it is always being reinvented and inflected by its inhabitants. For both a large city and a rich language, this openness, plasticity, and diversity allow them to serve an endless variety of purposes – many of which have yet to be conceived.

For Lefebvre (2003/1970: 101, 153), the very attempt by the state to eliminate differences (e.g. lived space) and to 'flatten social and cultural spheres' inspires resistance. 'Other forces [are] on the boil, because the rationality of the state, of its techniques, plans and programmes, provokes opposition' (Lefebvre 1991/1974: 23).<sup>18</sup> Though abstract space is powerful and dominates social space, there are always weak points that can be found through practice and can be pushed against (Lefebvre 2009: 144).

Again, knowledge is particularly important here. 'Knowledge [*saber*] is one such means' of maintaining hegemony, 'although this in no way interdicts a critical subversive form of knowledge (*connaissance* [*conocer*]); on the contrary, it points [to] the antagonism between a knowledge which serves power and a form of knowing which refuses to acknowledge

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<sup>18</sup> In Lefebvre's work, this opposition takes the form of 'counter-culture'.

power' (Lefebvre 1991/1974: 10). In fact, the knowledge that produces lived space is a source of inspiration for both producing more lived space and resisting the homogenizing interests of abstract space.

Thus our hope for emancipation is in both the contradictions that abstract space produces as it destroys old social relations in order to create new (capitalist) ones, and in our ability to produce spaces that 'accentuate differences', that is lived space (ibid: 52). As abstract space, served by hegemonic ideas about space (Brenner 1997: 277), seeks to homogenize, lived space by its very nature is constantly producing difference, what Massey (2005: 99) has referred to as 'radical heterogeneity'.

The idea of difference is particularly important for a number of reasons. As will be demonstrated in the empirical chapters about the CTU movement the question of difference, what I will refer to as uneven geographies, is an important characteristic of the CTU movement, acting as both an obstacle to the articulation of the movement, and at the same time as the basis for its articulation. In her work Massey (2005: 99) is keen to emphasize that space is 'the sphere of heterogeneity.' Similarly, it is important to note that Lefebvre does not argue that absolute space *is* homogenous; rather it *seeks to* homogenize (Lefebvre 1991/1974: 287; 2009: 227). With this in mind, I am choosing to use the term uneven geographies to denote two distinct aspects of 'difference' within space. The first is the unique characteristics and histories produced by the specific and changing social relations in each place. I will refer to this aspect of uneven geographies as 'geographies of difference' (a play on David Harvey's title *Justice, Nature & the Geography of Difference* [1996]). Geographies of difference show up in this project in a variety of ways, but are mostly discussed in relation to the difference found in and between barrios.

The second idea that the term uneven geographies seeks to convey is the sense of power differentials between places and across space. Again, Massey (1994: 3) puts it best when she says, 'since social relations are inevitably and everywhere imbued with power and meaning and symbolism, this view of the spatial [as a configuration of social relations] is as an ever-shifting social geometry of power and signification,' 'a complex web of relations of domination and subordination, of solidarity and co-operation' (ibid.: 265). Elsewhere, she calls these relations 'power-geometries' (Massey 1993, 1998, 2005), 'the construction of time-spaces through relations of social power' (Massey 1998: 23).<sup>19</sup> Critical to this research project, power-geometries can be understood both in terms of dominant power (power over) and in terms of popular power (power to or power with) that are inscribed in and produce space. Both geographies of difference and power-geometries are at play in the construction of popular power and the transformation of urban space in Venezuela today.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, returning to the idea of lived space, Lefebvre's exploration of lived space knowledges as an avenue for revolution echoes similar arguments that have emerged in Latin America over the past half-century. Inspired by liberation theology and the work of Paulo Freire (1972), more broadly understood as critical pedagogy or popular education, the question of knowledge has been used as the foundation for radical resistance and the principles upon which to build alternative societies. One of the primary struggles that popular movements have faced and are facing is the struggle over 'who knows' and 'what is it that they know?' In fact, one might say the very idea of whether or not popular power is possible sits upon this fulcrum.

Critical pedagogy theory helps us expand on how lived space is actively produced through

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<sup>19</sup> The term 'power-geometries' has also been adopted by the Bolivarian Revolution (Massey 2008).

<sup>20</sup> Again, wherever I mean to imply both of these dimensions of difference, I use the term uneven geographies.



concrete knowledge production practices and how lived space is a potential site of revolution. Also taking cues from Gramsci's concept of hegemony, critical pedagogy recognizes the important role that knowledge production plays in social struggles. It argues that reflection on lived experience is the basis from which to understand 'reality' and the self and to transform them both (Freire 1972: 79). Freire (ibid: 81) called this *concientización*, or consciousness-raising. Although lived experience is the basis of transformation, and experience 'may provide us with knowledge', this alone does not guarantee insights into reality nor the capacity to change reality (Giroux 2009: 36). In order to achieve liberation we cannot simply stop at knowledge of lived experience. We need to respect lived experiences and then go beyond them (Freire 1992/1998: 26, 85) – critique of experience is necessary (Giroux 2009: 36). Similarly, 'Lefebvre argues that only when everyday life is elevated to "critical thinking" is it possible to discern its actual relation to the process of reproduction' (Aronowitz 2007: 137).

Freire was also keen to emphasize that knowledge, even critically examined collective knowledge, is not enough to transform society. Rather, liberation comes from conscious action (Freire 1972: 26), that is, action that is based on critical reflection of lived reality with the intention of transforming society. Freire called this relationship between action and reflection 'praxis'. Praxis, then, produces revolution. This discussion about the relationship between lived space, knowledge, and revolutionary praxis will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

## **MULTIPLE GEOGRAPHIES: RECONCILING TERRITORIAL MOVEMENTS AND SPACE**

Thus far this chapter has identified multi-dimensional space, geographies of difference and

power-geometries as geographies that this project understands to be involved in the construction of popular power and the transformation of urban space. Other geographies which come to inform the CTU movement and are produced and utilized by the movement will also be raised during the course of the thesis. Leitner et al (2007: 20) argue that 'those practicing contestation make use of multiple spatialities in complex and unpredictable ways to make new geographies... Thus, it is vital to theoretically and empirically investigate the simultaneity of such multiple engagements with (and imaginaries of) space, and how different spatialities are co-implicated.' They cite body mobility, networking, scale jumping, and localization as just some examples of multiple spatialities that movements are involved in.

In this section, I want to briefly discuss two other geographies that come into play during the investigation of the CTU movement. The first is the geography of place. As already argued above, in Venezuela the basis for the construction of popular power and the transformation of urban space is territory, or place (El Troudi 2004: 32-3; Escobar 2001; Fernandes 2010, Harnecker 2006; Motta 2011a: 36). This, argues Denis (2008), is a fundamental component of a new politics based on popular power. 'What is evident is that this other politics in these corners of the world are producing in the first place not "localism" but territoriality' (ibid.). Moreover, '[these new forms of politics] make sense in as much as they construct among themselves an "our politics" that exercises territorial control, internally instigating the means of concrete liberation that no one else is capable of pre-establishing nor directing from outside' (ibid.). Similarly, in her work about barrio-based social organizations in Cuba and Venezuela, sociologist Sujatha Fernandes (2010: 91-2) echoes these observations and argues that what she calls 'revolutionary practice' is different in the 21<sup>st</sup> century than it has been in the past. She attributes 'the changed circumstances of global capitalism' to leading to 'new

kinds of political organization and models of collectivity', which focus on the territorial location of the barrio, rather than the factory, 'as the site of labour and social life.' Additionally, other researchers underscore the importance of territory in the construction of popular power for many Latin American popular movements (see Escobar 2001; Ulrich 2004; Postero 2007; Karriem 2009).

The popular power connection to particular territories is perhaps not surprising for barrio-based popular movements. According to Nijman (2010: 11), 'to those inside the slums, territoriality is often hugely important in terms of belonging, identity, safety, community, status and political organisation.' Similarly, the importance of territory was echoed by Schuurman (1989: 17) more than a couple of decades earlier who viewed this identification with territory as both a benefit and limitation for barrio-based movements. It is worth engaging at length with his assessment.

The urban poor have only one thing in common besides being poor, and that is living in urban zones deprived of both residential security and many basic services. The common territory, reinforced by family relations and cultural patterns, forms the locality of the daily-life experiences of its inhabitants.

This local space, then, constitutes the context in which absolute deprivation can crystallize into collective consciousness and action. Local space can be, and often is, a powerful orientation framework but at the same time carries the embryo of its own limitation in that respect...

The inner strength of territorially based movements will be fostered when

the foundation of the consciousness is slowly extended from concentrating on deficient basic services inside the local space, into the realm of a class struggle against a political system which is increasingly marginalizing the urban poor.

As we will see in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, the tension between territorial identity and the articulation between multiple territories for the mobilization of a popular movement has been a recurring theme for barrio-based movements in Venezuela. However, I want to emphasize that territoriality in and of itself is not the basis of limitation between different places. In other words, I want to take issue with Schuurman's assessment, which is similar to Neil Brenner (2001: 597) who equates 'location' to 'immobility' and 'territoriality' to 'enclosure'. Instead, I am arguing for an understanding of territoriality that draws on what Massey (1993) has termed 'a progressive sense of place'.

A progressive sense of place helps us to see how place, just like space, is constituted through social relations, making territorial places neither immobile nor enclosed. Rather, as was already discussed in Chapter 1, place is 'a particular articulation of those relations, a particular moment in those networks of social relations and understandings... Importantly, it includes relations which stretch beyond – the global as part of what constitutes the local, the outside as part of the inside...' (Massey 1994: 5). Thus 'the identities of place are always unfixed, contested and multiple' (Massey 1994: 5; see also Hart 2002: 35; Marston et al 2005: 426). Such a conceptualization that places are constructed by social relations also forms the basis for the discussion of difference, above, in which a progressive sense of place 'can recognize difference, and... can yet simultaneously emphasize the bases for potential solidarities' (Massey 1994: 8).

Territory, then, acts as the foothold from which historical geographic subjects emerge but who are not limited by the boundaries of this landed territory. For it is not the geographic locality that inherently limits or expands political activity and influence, but the power relations that are inscribed in that geography, e.g. the power of the state repressing or co-opting political activity of a community, the alternative political imaginaries made possible by the lived experience of inhabitants, and the lessons learned from histories of struggle.

Another geography emerges from this progressive sense of place. This is spatial scale. Already mentioned several times in the discussion about the Latin American 'left turn', the role of cities in the global economy, and the shift that the CTUs made from barrio-specific organizations to a national popular movement, spatial scales are thoroughly intertwined in the construction of popular power and the transformation of urban space. A number of important things must be pointed out about the idea of scale in the way that I want to use it. First, social scales, like space and place, are neither a priori nor fixed. They are, rather, produced by social processes and relations. As Marston and Smith (2001: 616) argue 'scaled social processes pupate specific productions of space while the production of space generates distinct structures of geographical scale.' This is despite the fact that scales have a real, material impact on how we live. e.g. my citizenship is based on which country I am from, not on the city I live in or the fact that I have a woman's body.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, scale is temporary and constantly being reterritorialized into new configurations (Brenner 1997). For example, Brenner argues that we are seeing the massive restructuring of scales under neoliberalism and, at the same time, the strategic use of scale and 'envisioning [of] radically different scalar arrangements based upon principles of radical democracy and social justice rather than the capitalist logic of endless accumulation' (Brenner 2001: 594).

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<sup>21</sup> At the same time, for example, what city I live in might make a difference to what kind of taxes I pay.

This gets us to the second aspect of scale: scale-making is strategic and political. Social actors produce scales, like space, according to their needs and interests. Therefore, 'scale-making should be understood as an embodied process undertaken by social agents themselves shaped by gender, race, class and geography operating within particular historical contexts' (Marston & Smith 2001: 617). This also means that scale-making can be contradictory, specific to each social configuration, uneven and infused with difference.

Third, social scales must be understood in relation to each other (Brenner 2001: 600). Rather than perceive scales in a hierarchical relationship, we should think of them as being in a mutually constituting relationship. This tension between the necessary territorial implications of different scales and the mutually constituting relationship between them is perhaps best exemplified in the debate about the global-local dichotomy and the struggle to recognize the local as not always suppressed or determined by larger territorial scales, such as the global, but as actually constitutive of those scales (Massey 2007).

My interest here is not to go into a full analysis of the debate surrounding scale, which has attracted a bit of attention, at least in the area of critical geography, up to the point where Marston et al (2005) have suggested the idea be abandoned altogether for all the theoretical problems it seems to generate (for a summary of recent debate see Marston 2000; Brenner 2001; Marston & Smith 2001; Marston et al 2005; Leitner & Miller 2007). Despite these problems, I propose we keep the idea in mind here because of the relevance the construction of scale has for the history and struggles of popular movements in Venezuela. The ability of Venezuelan popular organizations to articulate at various social scales has been an historical question that has limited their ability to act in urban space in a coordinated, powerful way. Keeping in mind that 'power is employed in the social

production of scale' (Leitner & Miller 2007: 116), the ability to collectively produce scales gives us insight into the extent to which popular movements can exercise power, both in geographic and institutional terms.

## **CONCLUSION**

In Venezuela, popular power can mean many things, and it is in fact an open debate. What this chapter has attempted to do is to lay a framework for how to engage in a spatialized analysis of how the construction of popular power also has an effect on urban space. I identified two kinds of general strategies that the CTU movement uses: *autogestión* and *cogestión*. Each of these general strategies reflects a distinct orientation to the relationship with the state.

Throughout the rest of the thesis several geographers will be relied upon to open avenues of enquiry into the role that popular power struggles play in the transformation of urban space in contemporary Venezuela. Henri Lefebvre's (1991/1974) work on the production of space has been identified as particularly important in that endeavour, as he allows us to begin unpacking the multiple spatialities that are involved in the production of space. His work also makes links to knowledge production and the kinds of knowledges that are involved in spatial struggles. The chapter has also identified other spatialities, such as territory, uneven geographies and scale as important components in the CTU's strategies to organize itself as a popular movement.

The idea of lived space will be raised again and again as central to the CTU movement's various strategies of constructing popular power. It will be discussed how lived space

knowledges come to inform the movement's strategies and how they in turn are transforming urban space in different ways. Recognizing the importance of this kind of analysis in the context of the urban, Edward Soja (1996, 2000, 2010) suggests that the study of the urban has mostly been based on perceived space and conceived space which has limited our ability to see the city as 'an active arena of development and change, conflict and resistance, an impelling force affecting all aspects of our lives' (Soja 1996: 11). He argues that it is lived space that incorporates and animates the first two, and suggests that this is where it is necessary to expand research. Soja's observation is important to heed because it is precisely lived space that urban popular movements utilize and produce as a means of transforming urban space more broadly. It is this area of research that much of this thesis investigates.



## Chapter 3

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### THE PRODUCTION OF URBAN SPACE IN VENEZUELA

*I come from where you have not been  
I have seen things that you have not seen*

*In my country  
Tourists enjoy views  
Of beautiful things  
The rich Venezuela*

*But to the hills  
Where misery is pondered  
And hope moves further away  
No one takes them*

*They hide with shame  
The other Venezuela  
The Venezuela of the poor*

...

*The truth about Venezuela  
Is not seen in the Country Club  
The truth is seen in the hills [los cerros]  
With their people and their restlessness*

‘Yo vengo de donde usted no ha ido’  
Alí Primera (1942-1985), Venezuelan singer, songwriter and activist

*When we started to debate the issue of the socialist city, we would say that the city is a social act. Why? Because we produce the city – we all produce it. Who built the city in this country?... The workers.*

*And it’s the workers that continuously reproduce it. In the Urban Land Committees we say that we, the barrio inhabitants, have made the city two times: we made the [formal] city in the daytime, and then on the weekends and at night we produced the barrio city. But we are constantly making it – those that work in the factory, those in transport, those who take care of services, those that produce culture. Those that produce in a continuous way are the pobladores.*

Cristóbal, Urban Land Committee Activist,  
Pobladores Movement School for Activists, 2 August 2009

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the production and transformation of urban space in the history of Venezuela. According to Henri Lefebvre (1991/1974: 229), ‘in space, what came earlier continues to underpin what follows. The preconditions of social space have their own particular way of enduring and remaining actual...’ In other words, social space

that is experienced today contains the sediments of past space and it is upon these sediments that new space is produced. Keeping in mind the multiple dimensions of space discussed in Chapter 2 – the perceived (physical aspects of space), conceived (ideas about space), and lived (experience in/of space) – this chapter engages in a narrative of Venezuela's urban history, paying attention to key moments when new social relations deposited new preconditions. These moments include colonialism, the discovery of oil, the transition to democracy via the Punto Fijo Pact, the economic crisis of the 1980s and 1990s, and the election of Hugo Chávez. While these are moments that are common to most Venezuelan histories, the purpose of this research project is to engage in the question of how *popular movements* are producing and transforming urban space. Thus while keeping sight of the historical contexts already mentioned, this chapter will push to the foreground other, less-scrutinized aspects of Venezuelan history that will unearth the sediments upon which recent popular urban transformation is based.

The first key aspect in this approach is the history of urban land. This is important from the perspective of how land ownership and land use have contributed to what Roberts (2005: 118) calls Venezuela's 'socio-spatial segregation', that is, the socio-economic disparity between elites and popular classes that manifests itself as a geographic division between what Cristóbal, above, refers to as the formal 'city' and the *barrio*. Alí Primera's poignant lyrics give a sense of how this socio-spatial segregation affects the lived experience of Venezuela and how politics might be shaped by these divergent places within the city. Recognizing land as a key component of urban spatial segregation/production will lend insight into why contemporary territorial-based politics has resonance in Venezuela and why

the barrios are a position from which to transform power relations in the city.<sup>1</sup>

Second, and most important, this chapter also traces past popular urban practices and their role in producing urban space, including the physical construction of the city and struggles to permanently settle on urban land, formal and semi-formal organizations, and the evolving relationship with the state. These 'preconditions' found in barrio histories give shape to the construction of popular power that we see in Venezuela today. Furthermore, examining how urban inhabitants – not just the state and capital – have produced urban space illuminates the dimension of socio-spatial production (lived space) that Lefebvre (1991/1974; Soja 2000: 12) argues is essential to radical urban transformation. This will allow a deeper consideration in forthcoming chapters of how the CTU strategies to construct popular power are transforming urban space in Venezuela.

On this point several methodological considerations arise that must be mentioned here. First, few formally published Venezuelan histories (in English or Spanish) deeply consider the protagonism of popular classes, especially before the urban uprisings in 1989 when barrio residents suddenly appear as agents in Venezuelan historical narratives.<sup>2</sup> I would suggest that this gap in historical research is evidence of the hegemonic character of the modern state since its consolidation under a democratic government in 1958, where the state apparatus, with the explicit backing of various social sectors, presented itself as the 'stable centre – definitively – of (national) societies and spaces' (Lefebvre 1991/1974: 23). Thus the limited historical accounts of urban barrios is a reflection of this hegemony and has

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<sup>1</sup>Ricardo Briceño-León (2006) suggests that Venezuelan social norms recognize land ownership and land use (e.g. land owned by one person but used or worked by another) as equally legitimate, but different, claims to land, which are premised on a social hierarchy whereby ownership reflects a higher social status that is largely obtained as a 'birthright', and merely working the land cannot earn one ownership of it.

<sup>2</sup> For exceptions to this see Ray (1969), Peattie (1970), Plaza (1980, 1981), de Weishaar (1981), Vargas-Arenas (2007), and Fernandes (2010b).

contributed (by its absence) to the discourses about so-called Venezuelan 'exceptionalism' and the 'illusion of harmony' (Lander 2004) that infected many historical studies about the democratic era.

As a result, this project draws on historical accounts of the barrios that have been written by barrio residents themselves or studies, often conducted by Venezuelan undergraduate and graduate students, about individual barrios. This means that the analysis here of popular practices that have historically contributed to the production of Venezuelan urban space is, in part, constructed from an assortment of locally-focused accounts. These highly localized accounts both demonstrate the diversity of barrio experiences and mirror historical socio-spatial segregation *between* barrio communities. Importantly, recognizing these features of barrio struggles will help to explain why the contemporary national movement of the Urban Land Committees (CTUs) is so significant, in that its very existence suggests that a new form of popular power and a new urban space are being constructed in the Bolivarian Revolution.<sup>3</sup>

A second methodological point to note is the emphasis placed on urban space produced *through the place of Caracas*. Like most primate cities,<sup>4</sup> many spatial scales – local, regional, national, and global – powerfully intersect through Caracas giving rise to political and economic organization that are both unique to the capital city and have emanating effects on other parts of the country (see Peattie 1987; Castro Guillén 1993: 26). As historian John D. Lombardi (1986: 6-7) argues, both literally and figuratively all roads lead to Caracas: everything from popular revolution to national economic projects have historically been

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<sup>3</sup> See Chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>4</sup> A primate city is a situation in which a highly disproportionate concentration of a country's people, economic, and political power are located in a single city. Many Latin American countries are characterized by a high degree of urban primacy.

born in or have centered on Caracas. In theoretical terms, what this signals is that urban space is not a fixed thing but a *process* that traverses many places and spatial scales (Harvey 1989: 127; Massey 1993: 66), for urban space involves not just the location of the city but also the logics that produce the city (Lefebvre 2003/1970; Smith 2003). At the same time, diverse geographies, community histories, and power-geometries inscribe a multiplicity of differences within Caracas that will also be discussed in this chapter (Hart 2002).

Finally, Lefebvre (1991/1974: 170) suggests that the production of space begins at the smallest scale of human practice: the body. David Harvey (2000: 101) further suggests that 'a return to the body' helps to ground 'the theoretical abstractions that have for too long ruled purely as abstraction.'<sup>5</sup> Levied as a critique of postmodern theory, David McNally (2001: 2) gets more to the point when he says that the body has been 'de-materialized, relieved of matter, biology, the stuff of organs... Sensible needs – for food, love, sex, and shelter – are not countenanced...' (Of course, the same might be said for economic historical materialist studies, as well.) Yet the intensely sensual experience of urban life in Venezuela, especially barrio-based life, is an important if little-recognized aspect of urban space and its production. Likewise, the body is a key component of popular struggles, which are often highly physical and emotional, whether in terms of building one's own house, spending long hours in close proximity to other people, or using the body itself as a mode of resistance. So while this research does not explicitly examine the spatial implications of the body, the corporeal dimensions of urban spatial production should not simply be ignored, either. Hence, with an interest in grounding the theoretical abstractions used in this project, and despite the limited extent to which words on paper can impart a visceral understanding, I

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<sup>5</sup> The body is often conceived of by geographers as another spatial scale that must be incorporated into an analysis of space as both a site of production (Harvey 2000: 101-17) and reproduction (Marston 2000; Marston & Smith 2001). Harvey (2000: 130), however, argues that the body should be politicized further as a 'nexus through which the possibilities for emancipatory politics can be approached.'

attempt to write the physical experience of Venezuelan urban spatial production into the historical and empirical narratives in this and the next several chapters.

With those methodological considerations in mind, the chapter begins with an introduction to present-day Caracas. The second section discusses the beginning of Caracas's primacy and of socio-spatial segregation premised on land ownership. The third section examines the impact of the new oil economy and the dictatorships on urban growth and the emergence of a modernization agenda in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The next two sections look at the transition to democracy and the so-called *Punto Fijo* period. This is where the politics of the barrio communities and their relationship with the state come into focus. The final sections highlight the transformation of popular urban practices during the economic crisis of the 1980s and 1990s, which subsequently led to the presidential election of Hugo Chávez.

## **¡BIENVENIDO A CARACAS!**

Arrival into Venezuela's major airport 'Simon Bolívar' in the coastal town of Maquetia lives up to every expectation of a Caribbean country: sunny skies, white sand beaches and clear, blue ocean as far as the eye can see. From the airplane, one can see high-rise apartments dotting the strip of land between the beach and the mountain range, called *El Ávila*, which separates the airport from the capital city of Caracas (see Map 3, p. ix). At just north of the equator and almost 1,000 meters above sea level, Caracas rests in a long, narrow valley nestled between *El Ávila* and a series of smaller ranges to the south. The only access to the city from the coast is a steep, twisting highway – one that is dangerous at night due to possible robberies and kidnappings and risks being closed during heavy rains and

threatening mudslides. Along this highway the city announces itself to visitors much sooner than any official map would suggest. Caracas's barrios wind their way up shallow ravines and creep over hilltops long before one descends into the congested, bustling streets of the capital. With over 7 million people who crowd its busy streets and hundreds of thousands more who stream in from various access routes, looking for housing and employment or participating in political activities, the city's noise, people, history, and present-day struggles, combined with balmy heat and frequent rain showers, immediately press in on residents and visitors alike. Entry into the city is a shocking contrast to the serene, coastal landscape.

After making its way through crowded boulevards, where traffic rules are regularly ignored by both drivers and pedestrians, the bus that carries passengers from the airport finally drops them off at *Parque Central*. Though it takes its name from New York City's Central Park, this concrete complex is comprised of luxury hotels, a variety of museums, and the two largest skyscrapers in the city that house expatriates and middle- and upper-class residents. Directly across from the towers to the south sits a large barrio that seemingly rises straight out of the valley floor, called San Agustín. Contrary to the modern, concrete edifices, the barrio's web of self-made streets and staircases, visible from the avenue below, are virtually impassable by cars. This is attested to by the fact that the government is building a cable car system to bring people down from the peaks and into the central city. For now, most people walk down the hillsides to catch a small bus that will take them to work and school.

**Photo 3: Caracas Valley**



A view of Caracas Valley from the barrios of Antimano towards the city center. To the right is the middle-class neighborhood of Montalbán. In the background is *El Ávila*. Photo by author.

Up and down the valley, Caracas bears the marks of many decades, if not centuries, of struggle. Today, this is most visible in two particular ways. The first is in the physical organization of the city, above all its socio-spatial segregation. Middle- and upper-class apartment buildings, state-owned buildings, formal urban infrastructure and services, and major businesses are mostly found on the valley floor where land speculation and expensive building costs have driven up the prices of housing. In contrast, self-built barrio communities occupy *los cerros* – the hillsides that Venezuela’s most famous musician, Alí Primera, sings about (above) – where access is attainable by steep staircases, 4x4 Jeeps, and mini-buses that shuttle passengers through mazes of narrow, winding streets. Many of the barrio communities closer to the valley floor were built more than 70 years ago and have basic services such as electricity and sewage. The more recently built houses, though, are found higher up, often on precarious land that poses a high risk of landslides and poor irrigation.



While these geographic distinctions do not fall along strict class lines (indeed, the barrios are home to a range of people, including professional classes, and some of the wealthiest neighborhoods are located in the lush hillsides on the eastern side of the city), the socio-spatial segregation and the modes of producing these distinct urban zones speak of the intense struggle over land and housing that is fundamental to how the city has been produced.

Second, the contemporary struggle with and over the state – that is, the Bolivarian Revolution – is etched on the walls, streets and buildings of the city in spray paint, banners, and posters. Murals and brightly colored houses signal the presence of government-sponsored programs,<sup>6</sup> and support for President Chávez peppers the views across the city. However, these markings that proclaim the march towards Twenty-First Century Socialism sit antithetically alongside swaths of commercial advertising featuring fair-skinned women, Coca-Cola products, and Polar Ice labels (a Venezuelan private beverage company, specializing in beer). Since the transformation of Caracas into a major international port for the region during the colonial period and with the political and economic power that accumulated there in subsequent centuries (Mago de Chopite 1986: 50; Lombardi 1986: 17-19; Sanoja Obediente & Vargas-Arenas 2008), the capital city has crystallized into the epicenter of socio-economic, political and cultural struggle in Venezuela. The very streets and plazas of the city, which now regularly fill with pro- and anti-government demonstrators, also act as vivid symbols of past struggles, physically locating the origins of the 1958 overthrow of the Pérez Jiménez dictatorship and the transition to democracy, the 1989 uprisings against structural adjustment, and the 2002 attempted coup against Hugo

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<sup>6</sup> *Plan Barrio Nuevo Tricolor* was launched in 2009 as a government program to make minor improvements on barrios houses. For many of the houses this amounts to a repainting of the exterior, making the spread of the program easy to spot. For more on this see Chapter 6.

Chávez. In turn, these and other less-visible events and processes have also played a role in producing and transforming the urban space of Caracas.

In short, the experience of Caracas is that of a living, breathing organism, reflected as much in the decay of neglected downtown buildings as in the expectant growth of the barrios where rooftops are speared by rebar in preparation for the next generation's housing. The city, as Cristóbal suggests at the beginning of the chapter, is constantly being produced in a myriad of contrasting, contested ways by the very inhabitants that live there.

## **THE BEGINNING OF THE BARRIOS AND THE ISSUE OF LAND**

The concern here, of course, is on the role of barrio inhabitants in the city. Iris Rosas Meza (2004) traces the first barrios of Caracas to the period of 1917-1929. By 1950, they would make up one-quarter of the total population, and today, more than half of all Venezuelans are barrio residents (FEGS 2007). The first barrios grew mainly around the large historic haciendas in *parroquias* La Vega and Antímano in the southwest of the city, and also around South Petare on the far east side of the Metropolitan Area (ibid.: 264, see Map 2, p. xi).

Like in many other Latin American countries, the barrios grew mostly due to rural-urban migration that was motivated by the search for employment. However, the very fact that barrios exist and where they are located connects to a compounded history of land struggles. The question of land, how it is organized and to whom it belongs, has been a defining feature of Venezuela's spatial<sup>7</sup> organization and social struggles since the colonial

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<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that the term 'spatial', as it is used in this chapter, does not simply refer to the physical organization of space but, following Lefebvre (see Chapter 2), refers to the multiple dimensions of space and the power relations that produce them.

period and has had an effect on both the growth of Caracas as a primate city (and thus, the spatial organization of the country) and the internal organization of the city.

In terms of the consolidation of Caracas as a primate city, from the colonial period to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Caracas acted as the chief port city for international agricultural exports, such as cocoa and coffee. 'The major part of Venezuelan production destined for export was concentrated in the capital, from which it would make its way to the Guaira [Caracas] Port, where it would then be shipped' (de Weishaar 1981: 50). As a result, Caracas became the central link between various Venezuelan cities, while control over the circulation of agro-export commodities limited the growth of those other cities (Mago de Chopite 1986: 70; Portes & Johns 1989: 114; Sanoja Obediente & Vargas-Arenas 2008). A dramatic decline in the value of agricultural exports in the early 1900s and the discovery of oil around the same time did not reduce the importance of Caracas; rather, as the capital was made the prime target for industrial development financed by oil rents, it only served to strengthen Caracas's relative position in the country and to attract more residents.

As new residents arrived, however, it was evident that the blueprint for the organization of the city had already been sketched out in the colonial period. For it was then that most land in what is now the old city center was expropriated and occupied by elite colonial representatives. Across Venezuela, appropriation created a new relationship to the land and resulted in monopoly ownership (Mago de Chopite 1986: 51, 68; Siso Martínez 1962: 60; de Weishaar 1981: 95, 99). This was the birth of the modern-day *latifundio* (estate) in Venezuela which has left a majority ownership of both urban and rural land in the hands of a few, a common story across Latin America (Herman 1986; Blyde 2006: 139). Thus, from the colonial period, social and ethnic differences have been reflected in the city's organization and the

types of housing construction that were used. Indians and Africans lived in the western periphery of Caracas in shacks with thatched roofs, and *criollo* elite families from Spanish descent lived in the old city center (Mago de Chopite 1986: 73, see Map 2, p. xi). This is similar to the socio-spatial organization that has continued to develop in Caracas up to today, with the majority of the barrios located in the west and south and the wealthy neighborhoods situated in the center and towards the east. Moreover, the monopoly land ownership patterns that began during colonization became the future social order of Caracas, as those families who appropriated land became the new Venezuelan oligarchy (Armas Chitty 1967: 60-1; Plaza 1981: 187).

It is important to recognize that even early on socio-spatial segregation of the city was not reached by peaceful consensus. For example, no less than 19 slave rebellions around Caracas between 1525 and 1799 were reported (Vargas-Arenas 2007: 64; Mago de Chopite 1982: 46; Lombardi 1986: 10; Weaver 1976: 24). Though at the time the rebellions were framed in racial terms, historian Lombardi (1986: 10) argues that these early struggles were essentially about land and the power associated with it.

## **OIL, MODERNIZATION, AND ELIMINATION OF THE BARRIOS**

The discovery of oil in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a defining moment in Venezuela's history and has had a significant impact on the production of urban space in the country ever since. Already, Venezuelan governments since the 1850s had been pursuing a project of modernization premised on a European- and, later, North American-style of urbanization. The oil economy only served to accelerate the processes of urbanization and industrialization and led to the ongoing expansion of state bureaucracies that the country

still experiences today.

Due to the civil wars in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Venezuela was a highly fractured, highly indebted society that still relied primarily on agricultural exports. Consequently, before oil, it was one of the poorest countries in Latin American. Then oil was discovered during the repressive dictatorship of Juan Vicente Gómez (1908-1935). By claiming state ownership of the country's sub-soil,<sup>8</sup> Gómez was able to make the state the primary beneficiary of oil rents (Hellinger 2000).<sup>9</sup> At a dizzying speed, Venezuela became the largest producer of petroleum in the world by the end of the 1920s (ibid.; Martz 1986: 244). As a result, despite the state's increased dependence on foreign investment and technology for oil extraction (Aranda 1992: 21) (because it had neither the technology nor the capitalist class to extract and manage the reserves [Werz 1990: 183; Perez Sainz & Zarembka 1979: 6]),<sup>10</sup> the state experienced a process of rapid capital accumulation (Werz 1990: 185; Aranda 1992: 70).

The dictatorships of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Gómez, 1908-1945, and Pérez Jiménez, 1948-1958) used this capital to heavily invest in modernizing urban areas in a quest to emulate the cities of Europe (Almandoz 2006), particularly Paris (Semeco Mora 1995: 43). Following in the footsteps of President Antonio Guzmán Blanco (1870-1888), who believed that development of Caracas would symbolize the country's 'commitment to modernize' (Myers 1978: 228), by

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<sup>8</sup> Lefebvre (1991/1974: 324-6) points out that just such a move to expand the meaning of land maintains the importance of land - even within the industrial age when Marxist theory began to assume that capital and labor were the only important factors - and emphasizes the importance of thinking in terms of space (above and below ground).

<sup>9</sup> In an oft-quoted book and article, Terry Lynn (1987, 1997) argues that the main reason Venezuela has not been able to develop alternative industries, what she calls the 'Dutch Disease', is due to the fact that the state, and not the landlord class, is the recipient of oil rents. Hellinger (2000) disputes this position and argues that there is nothing to suggest that the country would have benefitted more from an alternative arrangement. Ellner (2008) adds to this, arguing that Karl's view places too much emphasis on oil as the source and solution of Venezuela's socio-economic problems.

<sup>10</sup> In 1976 oil was nationalized and has since been controlled by Venezuela's oil company PDVSA and its subsidiaries.

the 1950s, almost 50 percent of modernization investments were focused on the export center of Caracas (Villanueva Brandt 1995: 67). The major projects included Parisian-style avenues, highways, and parks, large-scale developments, such as *Parque Central* (mentioned above), the Central University, the military base, and upper-class residential neighborhoods. The building projects erased much of the previous era's infrastructure, with a few exceptions in the neighborhoods Catedral, Altigracia, and La Pastora where marks of Spanish colonial occupation can still be identified (see Map 2, p. xi).<sup>11</sup> The state also heavily invested in industrialization projects and quickly became the largest employer in Venezuela (Martz 1986: 73; Werz 1990: 183).

Since most of this development was focused on Caracas, the capital became the basis for a technocratic middle class 'because it was there that individuals were selected for prestigious positions within the burgeoning bureaucracy' (Myers 1978: 228). This all led to acceleration in both the Caracas's urbanization and primacy, and expansion of the state bureaucracy in the capital served to intensify the city's political weight across the country. Centralization of state powers to the geographic location of Caracas continues to have a significant impact not only on formal political processes but also on where the relative strength of popular organizations is centered, as is the case with the Urban Land Committees. However, from the time that oil was discovered to the present day, cities in general have expanded rapidly: in the period prior to the discovery of oil, urban residents made up less than 15 per cent of the population; by 1950 that number doubled; and by 1980 more than 70 per cent of Venezuelans would be living in urban areas (FECS 2007), a quarter of whom now reside in Caracas. Barrio residents have made up much of this population growth.

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<sup>11</sup> See Berman (1982: 147-155, 167-8) for a description of how the modernization of Paris also involved the bulldozing of historic neighborhoods and was epitomized by first the boulevard and then the highway.

The process of state-led capital accumulation in Caracas has exacerbated the internal spatial organization of the city as much as the country's spatial organization (Acosta 1987: 168). Under Gómez, the state began distributing oil rents as subsidies to landed elites in order to prevent unrest and to maintain loyalty to the ruler (Lombardi 1986: 22; Hellinger 2000: 117). For their part, the elite classes perpetuated land monopolies from the colonial period by investing their new wealth into urban land acquisition (Plaza 1981: 184-7; Fernandez & Ocampo 1974: 44). In a study of the land market of the 1950s, Plaza (1981: 182-3) found that

the purchase of urbanizable land was the safest, most rentable and quickest way to absorb large amounts of money. This was made easier by the fact that there were not high taxes on vacant land, which facilitated large land acquisitions, and as a result, a monopoly over the property market.

After the discovery of oil, urban land speculation in the Caracas Valley, which had already begun in the previous century, picked up pace and proved to be more profitable than most other types of economic investment (Torrealba 1983: 117), even eventually surpassing the petroleum economy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Rodríguez 2009).<sup>12</sup> Related to Plaza's point, above, the almost complete absence of property tax collection up to the present period (Martínez n.d.; CTU Metropolitan Assembly, 3 June 2010) made urban land speculation a low-risk endeavor.<sup>13</sup> Such speculation has forced the dispossessed peasantry to find shelter in the precarious hillsides of the valley and to build their own housing. It is in this way that ground

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<sup>12</sup> Fernandez and Ocampo (1974: 58) argue that historically the largest enemy of the Latin American 'people' has been the landlord class because of their interest in maintaining feudal relations.

<sup>13</sup> Moreover, Brazilian urban planner Edesio Fernandes (2002) has argued that 'the combination of weak capital markets, highly inflationary economies and deficient social security systems has turned land value appreciation into a fundamental capitalization mechanism [in Latin America], thus generating a culture of speculation that has long supported a heritage of patrimonialism and political clientelism.'

rent 'plays the fundamental role in mediating the geographical differentiation of urban space' (Smith 1984: 138) in Caracas. The geographic disparity between the landed classes and the dispossessed poor has also manifested as infrastructural disparities, what Soja (2010: 47-56) refers to as the 'endogenous geographies of spatial discrimination', which is about 'where things are put into space'. Such spatial discrimination is made apparent as one participates in the many '*recorridos*' (walk-throughs) that today's popular organizations conduct in an effort to become familiar with barrio needs. During these experiences socio-spatial segregation is not only measured by distance on a map but by the smell of open sewage, dirt roads, and crumbling houses that tell of the socio-economic distance between some barrios and the city center.<sup>14</sup>

**Photo 4: Recorrido of Antímano**



*A recorrido in parroquia Antímano with local CTU activists. Photo by author.*

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<sup>14</sup> See also Charles Hardy's (2007) *Cowboy in Caracas* for an English-language account of the conditions in the most infrastructurally-poor barrios.



The French urban planning that inspired the modern development of Caracas was premised on 'a spatially and socially segmented world – people here, traffic there; work here, homes there; rich here, poor there; barriers of grass and concrete in between...' (Berman 1982: 168). This is clearly distinct to the barrios' orientation towards multi-use spatiality that is at once multi-class, cultural, economic, political, and familial (Nijman 2010: 5).

The modernization project, though, goes beyond the physical segregations of the city. The influence of Parisian-style urban development also reflects a logic oriented toward order, control, and hierarchical social relations. The point here is not to suggest that urban infrastructural improvements run counter to radical urban transformation that is based on barrio lived experiences. On the contrary, the 'comprehensive rehabilitation' of the barrios, as the CTU movement calls it, is integral to the demands of many urban popular movements and has an important impact on daily life. Rather, the point here is to call attention to the influence that the modernization project – embraced by Venezuelan heads of state throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century – has had on ideas about urban space and what those ideas have meant for the lived space knowledges of the barrios. In the words of James Scott (1998: 57-8), these investments in urbanization and industrialization had 'no necessary relationship to the order of life as it [was] experienced by its residents.' Rather, it is based on 'the truths of scientific understanding' *to the exclusion of other forms of knowing* (Scott *ibid.*: 112). According to Venezuelan urbanists, the modernization projects destroyed the culture and history of the city and attempted to blot out the traditional cultures in the barrios (Sanoja Obediente & Vargas-Arenas 2008; Vargas-Arenas 2007). In fact, under Pérez Jiménez, the lived experience of barrio residents was openly under attack (see below). The urban

modernization project, popularized by French urban planning and replicated throughout Latin America (Almandoz 2006),<sup>15</sup> is furthermore an example of the 'intentional translation of power relations into the organization of space and movement for the purposes of production' (Stoller 2003: 2264).

This logic also percolated its way throughout state bureaucracies. As a result, the state-led modernization backed by oil rents and supported by ever-growing bureaucracies has led to what political scientist Isabel Licha (1990) calls the 'techno-bureaucratic' state in Venezuela. Corresponding to both Lefebvre's (1991/1974) characterization of 'abstract space' in which technical knowledge (*saber*) is elevated above other forms of knowing and Scott's (1998) concept of 'techne,' which seeks to order urban space to the exclusion of the logic of daily life (or *mētis*),<sup>16</sup> the techno-bureaucratic state which became prevalent in Venezuela in the 1930s 'legitimizes decisions in the name of rationality, efficiency, productivity and expertise, tending to exclude the common citizen from the political arena' (Licha 1990: 121). It 'erects [technical] knowledge as a condition for access to power' and assumes that economic growth is the sole measurement of progress (ibid.: 122).<sup>17</sup> This logic, though manifesting in distinct ways, has been present from the era of dictatorship to the present period. David Slater (2004) brings to the fore how power is implicated in such modernization logics. Whereas Slater emphasizes how modernization logics have been exported from the West (for Slater, the principle exporting agent is the United States) to the global South in order to employ 'a legitimizing mechanism for a continuing power over' (ibid.: 232), the emphasis

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<sup>15</sup> For general discussions of the impact of French urban planning on conceived space, please see Lefebvre (1991/1974; 1996/1968: 76-85), Berman (1982), Scott (1998: 107-145), Harvey (2008: 25-9). With specific reference to Latin America see Hardoy (1992), Almandoz (2006) and Morton (2011). See also Morton (2011: 87-93) for a discussion on the architectural strategies and implications of modern state-building.

<sup>16</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>17</sup> Licha (1990: 127) emphasizes that this does not mean that the techno-bureaucracy is a homogeneous block as it has its own internal contradictions connected to distinct class interests. This research project emphasizes how space is implicated in those differences.

here is on the internal adoption of those logics that were then used to draw dividing lines – physical, economic, cultural, and political – between classes in Venezuela and to employ ‘power over’ barrio inhabitants.

With this in mind, it is perhaps not surprising that the urban modernization project, underpinned by techno-bureaucratic, power-over logics, entailed not only urban development but also urban destruction. Both aspects were particularly acute during the Pérez Jiménez dictatorship (1948-1958) (Martz & Myers 1986: 73-4). Urban and barrio histories from Caracas chronicle the construction ‘boom’ of the 1950s (Werz 1990: 187), which included new highways, apartment buildings, government buildings, hospitals, etc. – much of which involved the removal of barrio communities (Imbesi & Vila 1995; Matapalo [n.d.]; Barrio Union 2003). At the same time, Pérez Jiménez saw the influx of indigenous and peasant traditions that were brought from the countryside to the barrios as an obstacle to modernization (Vargas-Arenas 2007). As such, he attempted to root out such ‘backward’ cultures by eliminating the spaces in which they were practiced, a not un-common approach to rural-urban migration in other southern cities in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century where the state systematically used its military and economic power to prevent rural people from access to the city (Davis 2006: 51-68). In Venezuela, Pérez Jiménez made it illegal to build *ranchos*<sup>18</sup> in an effort to curb the growth of the barrios (de Weishaar 1981: 216). For those residents already living in barrios, his government built ‘85 high-rise buildings’ that ‘housed a population of 160,000’ (Myers 1978: 242), many of which were located in a single area near the city center (see Map 3, p. xii).<sup>19</sup> However, the apartments were ill-suited to the needs of

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<sup>18</sup> *Ranchos* are shacks made out of scrap wood and metal. Usually these are the first structures in a barrio which are then converted over time into brick *casas* (houses).

<sup>19</sup> Adam Morton’s (2011: 89) commentary on Mexico City reminds us that such modes of housing initiated by the state, called *multifamiliares* in Mexico, ‘came to represent the modernism’ of various cities around Latin America.

barrio residents who often owned domestic animals, such as chickens,<sup>20</sup> and who were accustomed to the non-linear, unregulated spaces of the barrios (see Photo 4, p. 108; Photo 6, p. 160). Additionally, the new apartments were much too expensive for the poor (Handelman 1979: 16). As a result, the *superbloque* (large apartment building) housing either left empty or, in the words of Mike Davis (2006: 68), was 'poached' as a middle-class benefit (Handelman 1979: 57). When barrio residents resisted relocation to these *superbloques* they were met with heavy state repression. The government turned to bulldozing the barrios in order to force people to move (Ray 1969: 31; Lomas del Viento 2004; Unión Parte Alta 2006).

**Photo 5: Superbloques**



The superbloques of 23 de enero that were built by the Pérez Jiménez regime and then occupied by barrio residents when the dictator fled the country. Typical barrio houses can be seen settled into the spaces between the apartment blocks. Photo by Matthew Cassel.

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<sup>20</sup> The sounds of chickens and roosters still fill the night air in the barrios.

Despite his attempts to eliminate the barrios, under Pérez Jiménez 'the country [would] experience a strong capitalist transformation never before known...' (Plaza 1980: 2), and it was the intense industrialization which accompanied this transformation that attracted more peasants into Caracas and its barrios, intensifying the struggle between the techno-bureaucratic logics of the state and the lived experiences of the barrios.<sup>21</sup> This rapid industrialization also served, in part, to bring about Pérez Jiménez's own demise as business interests became stronger and an economic crisis pitted them against the dictator (Karl 1987), and barrio communities began to consolidate (turn their *ranchos* into houses) and turned to open resistance against the dictatorship (Plaza 1980).

Thus, authoritarian rule under Pérez Jiménez was resisted by a cross-section of society that included barrio residents, business interests, unions, and a political party coalition that had overseen a brief democratic period in 1945-1948, called the *trienio*. These sectors called for mass mobilizations in Caracas and a national strike, eventually forcing Pérez Jiménez to relinquish power. In various parts of Caracas the dictator's departure was celebrated by reoccupying the *cerros* (barrio hillsides) from which they had been removed (Fadda 1987: 334; Barrio Union 2003; Matapalo n.d.). In another part of the city, the departure on 23 January 1958 was marked by the occupation of the empty *superbloques*, mentioned above (Ray 1969: 31; 23 de Enero n.d.). It was not for five more years that the occupation was legalized by the new democracy. By then, the neighborhood, named *23 de enero* (23<sup>rd</sup> of January, see Map 2, p. xi) in honor of the dictator's departure, had become one of the most politically active barrio communities in the country, still recognized as such today, and a base for the guerrilla movement of the 1960s.

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<sup>21</sup> It should be noted that I am not suggesting that these are pure, distinct spaces. On the contrary, as will become clearer in the discussion of the democratic period, distinct logics and knowledges are constantly informing each other and producing a variety of social relations and, thus, urban spaces.

## PUNTO FIJO: EXCEPTIONALISM OR SOMETHING ELSE?

The years 1958-1998 are often referred to as the *Punto Fijo* period for the pact that was struck between elite actors to ensure the successful transition to a democratic government. The pact was led by political party *Acción Democrática* (AD, Democratic Action) who had led resistance efforts against the dictatorships since the 1920s and had led the brief *trienio* government (1945-1948). This time around, AD sought to create a highly coordinated alliance with two other political parties: *Comité de Organización Político Electoral Independiente* (COPEI, Independent Electoral Political Organization Committee), and *Unión Republicana Democrática* (URD, Democratic Republican Union) (Plaza 1980: 5).<sup>22</sup> The pact was meant to overcome the social fractures that had led to the overthrow of the *trienio* government, while at the same time limiting the strength of the *Partido Comunista de Venezuela* (PCV, Venezuelan Communist Party), which had played an instrumental role in removing Pérez Jiménez and in organizing labor unions in the previous decade (Bonilla-Molina & El Troudi 2004: 34).<sup>23</sup> Fearing that dictatorial sympathizers would seek to destabilize the democracy, the pact committed the three center-left parties to shared leadership (until URD was eventually squeezed out), a regular rotation of the presidential seat, and guaranteed coalition support to whichever party won the presidency (Martz 1995: 35-8). AD candidate Romulo Betancourt won the first Presidential election and began his government in 1959.

On the economic front, historians agree that a collective consensus, which included the

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<sup>22</sup> For the sake of understanding the positions of these parties, AD can be considered social democrat, COPEI Christian democrat, and URD liberal democrat (Bonilla-Molina & El Troudi 2004: 33).

<sup>23</sup> The PCV and other leftist parties were banned in 1962 in response to the armed guerrilla attacks but were re-legalized in 1969 and incorporated into the electoral system (Hellinger 1991).

business sector, labor unions, political parties, state institutions and social movements, was reached at the beginning of the democratic period and called for more state intervention in order to meet social needs, on the one hand, and limit foreign competition, on the other (Werz 1990: 182, 189; Myers 1986; Ovalles 1987: 93). Captured in the national mantra '*sembrar el petróleo*' ('sow the oil') (Werz 1990: 189),<sup>24</sup> Venezuelans from both sides of the political spectrum would come to embrace 'state capitalism' – that is, a national capitalist economy largely supported by nationalization or state subsidy (Fadda 1987: 127; Werz 1990) – and consider few places to be outside the purview of the state (Keely 1995: 300). Through state capitalism, the popular classes received benefits, especially during the oil boom of the 1970s, in the form of state-subsidized staple food items and transportation services (through petroleum subsidies) (Werz 1990).<sup>25</sup> The state also started an employment program to assist the unemployed (Ellner 2008: 54). Social welfare benefits, however, were always precariously linked to the state of social unrest and the fluctuating level of oil rents (Pérez Sainz & Zarembka 1979: 9).

In terms of production, like other Latin American countries before, the new Venezuelan democracy 'sowed the oil' through an import-substitution industrialization (ISI) development model, which limped along until neoliberal reforms in the 1980s (Pérez Sainz & Zarembka 1979; Werz 1990; Ellner 2008: 85). William Robinson (1996: 149) describes ISI as 'the economic basis for populist political projects that prevailed throughout much of Latin America in the post-World War II period,' which involved 'multi-class alliances under the dominance of local elites and foreign capital that undertook state-sponsored income

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<sup>24</sup> This idea of 'sowing the oil' has been used by most Venezuelan governments to defend various economic strategies. Evident by the fact that the mantra is spray painted on the walls around Caracas, it is still an idea that Venezuelans continue to extol.

<sup>25</sup> These subsidies have continued and played an important role in catalyzing the 1989 urban uprising, see below.

redistribution, social welfare, and the promotion of local capital accumulation.' Thus, in addition to the welfare provision described above, Venezuelan private companies also became reliant on state subsidies to help them (rather unsuccessfully) compete against foreign firms (Naím & Francis 1995: 167; Keely 1995: 301; Roberts 2003: 47).<sup>26</sup> Additionally, immediately at the beginning of the democratic era the working class was incorporated into the industrial process through the major union, *Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela* (CTV, Confederation of Venezuelan Workers), which became closely affiliated with AD. At the same time, state institutions continued expanding.

Largely on the basis of a strong party system, Venezuela was lauded by academics and North American politicians<sup>27</sup> as an exemplar representative democracy, which included regular rotation of elected leadership, consistent two-party dominance with few significant distinctions between them, increased GDP (as a result of high oil revenues), apparent wealth distribution, and an ability to 'marginalize the left' and maintain a capitalist agenda (Ellner 2008: 54; Lombardi 2003). Venezuela appeared 'exceptional' compared to the instability of other Latin American countries who at the same time were experiencing coup d'états, dictatorships, and civil wars (Crisp & Levine 1998: 27). This characterization of Venezuela came to be known as the 'exceptionalism thesis' (Goodman, et al 1995; see also Crisp & Levine 1998; Roberts 2003: 40; Parker 2005; Ellner 2008).

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<sup>26</sup> However, most of the demand came from elite classes and internal production became centered on luxury goods, not wage goods (Weaver 1976: 43). Additionally, the value of the bolivar (currency) was inflated, making imports cheap and convenient. In the end, only a few industries were able to achieve full substitution, while the rest heavily depended on state subsidies (Hellinger 1991: 102-3; Werz 1990: 186). Meanwhile, employment grew not so much in the industrial sector but in the state bureaucracy and in service sectors (Acosta 1987; Werz 1990). For more on ISI in Venezuela, see Pérez Sainz and Zarembka (1979) and Werz (1990).

<sup>27</sup> One aspect that this chapter does not address is the close relationship that Venezuela has had with the United States since the democratic transition. Lombardi (1986) names 'US imperialism' as one of the three most important factors in Venezuelan history, and of course, foreign relations and global markets have had a significant impact throughout Latin America. In the space allotted, I have chosen, instead, to pay more attention to the barrios. For more on Venezuelan foreign relations, see Lombardi (1986), Ameringer (1986), Hellinger (1991), Ellner and Hellinger (2003), and Ellner (2008). For an overview of the impact of transnational capital relations in Latin America see Robinson (2008).



It was not until the 1980s when Venezuela sank into an economic crisis that was precipitated by the collapse of the ISI model and escalating foreign debt (Robinson 1996: 150), gripping countries throughout Latin America, that the appearance of a 'model of socially conscious democracy' (Goodman et al 1995: 4) began to break down. Now it is clear that such a characterization was only made possible by 'ignoring the diverse expressions of class tension' (Ellner 2008: 71) that were suppressed by state force or absorbed by political parties and state institutions in the form of clientelism and complex techno-bureaucratic structures (see below) (López Maya & Lander 2008). Furthermore, the exceptionalism thesis concealed the ideological battle between 'state capitalism' and 'state socialism' that has been an undercurrent of Venezuelan politics since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, at various moments finding expression in student protests of the 1930s, the guerrilla movements of the 1960s, the street mobilizations of the 1980s, and the Bolivarian Revolution in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (see below). Along this vein, recent research, such as that by Steve Ellner (2008) and Margarita López Maya (1999, 2000), is attempting to unravel the exceptionalism thesis in order to explain the emergence of the Bolivarian Revolution as a culmination of a history of struggle, rather than an anomaly or a rejection of democratic norms (see for example, Canache 2002).

The contest over the direction of the country and the government's move to demobilize, suppress or channel it is perhaps easiest to see at the beginning of the democratic transition, First, with comfortable control over the CTV, the largest union in the country,<sup>28</sup> AD 'abandoned the mobilization tactics of the past, purged peasant and labor organizations that insisted on further reform, and stopped trying to mobilize any previously unorganized groups' (Karl 1987: 85). Second, from 1958 onward, the AD government responded to strikes

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<sup>28</sup> Labor unions were important agents of resistance during the years of the dictatorship. However, they failed to develop an independent political platform and were subsumed into the state-led modernization project where they have tended to support governments over other movements, thus becoming an arm of the political parties (Salamanca 1998: 95-187; see also Harding & Spalding 1976).

and barrio demonstrations with the suspension of constitutional rights, barricades and, for a brief period, the banning of all leftist parties (Hellinger 1991: 88-92; Levine 1973; Plaza 1980). For example, in the 1,847 days that newly-elected President Romulo Betancourt was in office, constitutional guarantees were suspended for 778 days (Levine 1973: 50). Third, the government only recognized as legitimate certain types of political action, specifically those that were performed by 'legitimate' organizations. Betancourt reasoned that '*the people in abstract does not exist... the people are the political parties, the unions, the organized economic sectors, professional societies, university groups*'<sup>29</sup> (quoted in Levine 1973: 49, emphasis in original). Betancourt's words indicate what was deemed legitimate 'politics' by both Venezuelan state leaders and the mainstream academics that studied Venezuela, thus narrowing their field of vision to a particular kind of politics (see Motta 2009, 2011a), allowing the 'exceptional thesis' claims.

Rather than a radical revolution, as was hoped for by the PCV and youth-led, leftist factions from other parties (Ellner 2008), the outcome of the *Punto Fijo* pact resulted in a center-left agenda with a government that exerted control by '[creating] narrow policy and political fields' (Nicholls 2008: 849) in order to maintain political stability. The position of the democratic government towards the radical left and the continuance of Pérez Jiménez's economic policies (Plaza 1980: 13) led one leftist leader to say in an interview with Daniel Levine (1973: 48) that, 'Although intended to produce basic changes, [the pact] ended with renewed domination by the old dominant classes and power groups' (see also Aranda 1992: 219).<sup>30</sup> Hence, in response, youth sections of AD and URD broke away from their respective parties and joined the PCV, and it was not long before the new left was in open conflict with

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<sup>29</sup> Though later he would go on to restrict university student protests, as well, when they came to be the center of protest activities against the government (Levine 1973: 51).

<sup>30</sup> Examination of the political parties has demonstrated that they were elitist and closed to the rank-and-file (Navarro 1995).

the AD-led government (Plaza 1980). Concerns over the growing poverty in urban areas (ibid.: 9) and the government's repressive response would serve 'to drive [the militant] parties further toward a full-fledged strategy of insurrection' (Levine 1973: 51).<sup>31</sup>

Armed militant groups inspired by the PCV and the Cuban Revolution were strongest in the barrios of Caracas – who did not vote for AD and broke out in spontaneous protest when Betancourt won (Myers 1978; Plaza 1980) – and the Central University of Venezuela (Plaza 1980: 15), an important base for political resistance throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The ensuing guerrilla movement relied on attacks, kidnappings, barrio blockades and basic robbery to make its cause known (Hellinger 1991: 111). The government responded with police repression against political mobilizations and, at one point, military occupation of the barrios of Caracas. The guerrilla movement would reach its peak around 1962 (Plaza 1980: 18), at which time it became clear by the PCV's own admission that they had failed to understand the political climate of the country in the post-dictatorship era (Vargas-Arenas 2007: 72; Plaza 1980). Incorporation into the electoral system in 1969 (Hellinger 1991) sealed the fate of the guerrillas and reflected the success that the state had in institutionalizing conflict. With the failure of the guerrillas, other strategies for institutionalizing conflict and absorbing/homogenizing urban space would become more prominent.<sup>32</sup>

Along with new strategies for suppressing and institutionalizing conflict, I put forward that the beginning of the democratic period is also the moment in which Caracas is no longer principally a product of state and capital but is more so a 'means of production' of urban

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<sup>31</sup> It should be noted that there was great internal disagreement about this strategy, the failure of which produced a number of off-shoots to the PCV (Plaza 1980).

<sup>32</sup> It is important to recognize that the state continued to use force against radical opposition, assassinating a number of opposition leaders even after the guerrilla movement ended (Ellner 2008). Today, an old jail in the San Juan *parroquia* of Caracas has been converted into a community center and a memorial for those that were tortured and killed during the *Punto Fijo* period (personal visit to the memorial, June 2008).

space (Lefebvre 1991/1974: 349) for both the state and popular actors across the country.

This suggestion is based on the argument that

the bureaucratic society and its expansion through planning and public policy do not just affect those living in the city proper but impose their powerful influence everywhere via the operations of the state and market. It is in this sense that Lefebvre claimed the whole world was being urbanized (Soja 2010: 96).

In this way, the Metropolitan Area of Caracas, starting in the democratic era, is used by the state as a means of producing a certain kind of urban space across Venezuela. According to Lisa Peattie (1987: 148), writing about her experiences from the late-1960s in Ciudad Guayana, '[urban] issues were general and national: growth, modernity, progress. The representation of the city in politics thus inevitably subordinated issues of daily life and individual realization to those of the project as defined... in Caracas.' Ésteban Emilio Mosonyo (1982: 257) characterizes this as the 'colonization of urban technocracy' where anything other than modernism is 'reprimanded with the most cruelty.'<sup>33</sup> The result in Ciudad Guayana, like in Caracas, was the creation of two cities: one made in the interests and logics of 'big business' and the other, a spontaneous city where people 'housed themselves as best they might' (Peattie 1987: 160), where inhabitants are 'themselves making history via individual and collective struggle' (ibid.: 141).

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<sup>33</sup> This is not a dead logic. A recent volume called *Detrás de la pobreza* (2004) (*Behind Poverty*) published by the Andrés Bello Catholic University, one of the elite private universities in Caracas, continues the argument that the reason barrio residents are poor is because they have not learned to be 'modern' (España N. 2004: 36-8). It goes on to suggest that Venezuela's overall problems can be traced back to the general lack of modern thinking across all classes (ibid.: 46-59).

## LIVED EXPERIENCE IN THE BARRIOS AND URBAN SPACE 1960s-1980s

With this in mind, I want to turn now to how barrio communities have made their own histories. Against the backdrop of ISI and state capitalism, this section focuses on the practices of urban popular organizations in Venezuela and the power relations that were forged with the state from the 1960s to the 1980s. While the guerrilla struggle was an important moment in Venezuelan history and informs popular power practices in Caracas, namely in 23 de Enero, as well as serves as a reference point for today's popular movements, other less-visible collective urban practices have also left sediments of urban space that shape the construction of popular power today.<sup>34</sup> Such a glimpse into the historical lived experience of barrio inhabitants will expose in subsequent chapters the struggles and contradictions that the CTU movement faces in its efforts to transform urban space.

The transition to democracy brought with it the largest 'wave', as Talton F. Ray (1969: 4-6) describes it, of rural-urban migration which was motivated by the 'pull' of the new democratic government's industrialization plans (Aranda 1992: 219) – even though there were far fewer jobs than there were people looking for work (Powelson & Solow 1965: 51; Friedmann & Sullivan 1974: 386; Acosta 1987: 167) – as agricultural production became less viable due to land monopolies and imported agro-technologies that reduced peasant work (Werz 1990: 191). This wave was so significant that 'more barrios trace their origin back to those first 24 months following the [democratic] Revolution than any other period' (Ray 1969: 6). Following on the heels of two previous waves – 1945 (the *trienio*) and 1950-57 (Pérez Jiménez's industrialization projects) – the barrios suddenly became an important political and economic agent within Venezuela. Though they may not have been a cohesive, organized group, they became both the voting base and the labor base of the

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<sup>34</sup> This section draws largely on individual barrio histories and a few cross-barrio studies.

industrializing, democratic country.

Initial organization in the barrios is often motivated by the need to occupy the land. While homes are usually individually constructed, occupation of the land is often done collectively in order to better resist eviction (Trigo 2004: 131). The process of occupation<sup>35</sup> and eviction are long, hard-fought battles that have time and again pitted barrio residents against state institutions, not just private owners. The first known barrio organization of any significant scale was the *Confederación de los Sin Techos* (The Homeless People's Confederation), established in the 1930s in Caracas, whose primary purpose was to prevent evictions (Grohmann 1996: 39). The ability to overcome the initial settlement phase and to begin constructing permanent houses forges a unique collective identification to the land and housing (Rosas Meza 2004: 708; Virtuoso 2006: 214).<sup>36</sup> One barrio woman from Caracas testifies that fighting to stay on the land was the beginning of her community organizing itself. 'Our birth as a neighborhood grew out of the fight for possession of the land' (quoted in Vielma & Aguero 1992: 47). Peattie (1970), Fadda (1987), Vielma and Aguero (1992), Grohmann (1996), and Calzadilla et al (1999) each describe individual barrio experiences in which the resistance to eviction and a sense of identification with a community served as the basis from which to create formal organizations, to demand infrastructure and services, and sometimes to confront the state using mass mobilization, media campaigns, and sit-ins

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<sup>35</sup> It is important to note that the terms used to describe this initial moment of settling a new barrio have political significance. For example, the words '*tomar*' (to take) and '*ocupar*' (to occupy) are used by CTU activists, while the terms '*invadir*' or '*invasor*' (to invade, invader) are considered pejorative and do not reflect the legitimate right to the land that activists claim. In one instance, after a multi-hour stand-off with the local military during an occupation, one CTU activist smiled with satisfaction when the military captain finally used the word 'occupants' rather than 'invaders'. Even though the month-long occupation failed, 'at least he started to understand our politics. That's a start,' the activist told me (personal conversation, Silvia, 5 July 2009, Maturín, Monagas)

<sup>36</sup> Though the extent to which residents share a collective identity varies according to the location of the barrio. In Caracas, it is noted that where barrios are located on the hillsides – low, medium, or high – affects identification (Grohmann 1996: 107-8), thus creating another variable in the heterogeneity of the barrios.

(Mosonyo 1982: 274; Fadda 1987: 364).<sup>37</sup> Several interviews with urban activists describe how barrios often also organize to create educational opportunities for young people, such as building their own schools, forming cultural groups (e.g. dance and theatre), and organizing sports activities. According to Fadda (1987: 353), actions taken by barrio organizations can range from looking for services to attacking the very nature of urban space.

These struggles, from basic survival to attacking urban space, have two particular features that are important here. First, the process and experience of struggle has varied from barrio to barrio, where some communities based their struggles primarily on cultural practices (Calzadilla et al 1999: 139; Fernandes 2010b), others were inspired by religious affiliations (Fadda 1987: 335-8; Ramia 1990: 67-73; Fernandes 2010b), some were mobilized by radical political parties (Martínez et al 2010: 33), and still others have not historically engaged in collective struggles and are lacking the experience of what one might call *autogestión*, or popular power. In the same vein, the outcome of each of these struggles has been distinct. How struggle has varied across the city has, in turn, created a kind of unevenness between barrio communities (Hart 2002) that has, on one hand, contributed to their heterogeneity and, on the other, made it more difficult to articulate at wider scales (Grohmann 1996: 162).

Second, these struggles have produced a politics based on territoriality and not explicitly on class. According to Bryan Roberts (1989: 684),

The weakness of work-based identities and the emergence of others that have a less coherent relation to class allegiances affect urban social movements in non-core countries... There is, indeed, little associative

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<sup>37</sup> Resistance and organization was not always the outcome of forced removal. Sometimes nothing was done (Mosonyo 1982: 269).

traction at all in the cities of the developing world beyond that provided by community allegiances.<sup>38</sup>

Roberts's observation – that urban movements in the global South primarily organize around local concerns – largely holds true for Venezuela up until the 1990s. In interviews, several CTU activists acknowledged that while there has been significant social struggle, as will be discussed below, Venezuela does not have a strong history of popular movements that other Latin American countries can claim, precisely because of the tendency for urban popular organizations – that is, organizations whose demands involve land, housing and urban improvements – to seek highly localized, or even individualized, solutions to basic needs (see also Peattie 1970; Fadda 1987; Acosta 1987: 193; Cariola 1995: 95-99). This is in part due to the diversity discussed above and in part because of a larger political dynamic that has given shape to urban power relations and, in turn, urban space. The point here is that we should not accept Roberts's observation as a truism; rather, wider urban social relations should be examined.

Beginning with the *Punto Fijo* period, the state assumed a 'de facto' legal compromise with the 'illegal' barrios (Bolívar Barreto et al 2000). This meant that new migrants were 'allowed' to settle and barrio communities were allowed to consolidate permanent housing. Forced removals still occurred but were targeted at barrios that occupied developable land, that is, land that could be used to build middle- and upper-class residences and commercial centers (Fadda 1987).<sup>39</sup> To be sure, the near impossibility of preventing migration into Caracas,

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<sup>38</sup> Barrios themselves are multi-class (Roberts 1989: 685; Peattie 1974: 104).

<sup>39</sup> Though the de facto legal position of the barrios seems to make legal tenure a moot point, it is the concern over this second norm – the preference given to private, commercial interests over barrio residents (or exchange value over use value [Lefebvre 1996/1968: 66]) – and the intense land speculation prevalent in Caracas today that has motivated barrio residents to seek land title through the Urban Land Committees, thereby protecting themselves from forced removal (Antillano 2005).



noted above, and the necessity for cheap labor within the state-led industrialization process that the new regime was expanding upon were important factors in this policy shift (Portes & Johns 1989: 122; Ray 1969: 43). A student of barrios of the global South, Janice Perlman (1990: 6) notes that 'it was recognized in the early 1960s that the self-built shanty towns of Third World cities were not the problem but the solution and that giving land tenure to the squatters and providing urbanized lots in peripheral areas yielded better results than the bulldozer.'

Beyond this de facto – not yet legalized – relationship, however, the lived experience of barrio inhabitants during Venezuela's democratic period has been fundamentally connected to the penetration of the state into all areas of Venezuelan society. In the words of Brian Crisp and Daniel Levine (1998: 32), 'the major mass-based political parties effectively penetrated and controlled organized social life, monopolizing resources and channeling political action.' This is the most significant delimiter of popular organizations in Venezuela and, despite the apparent shift in state policies under Chávez, continues to be an important factor in the construction of popular power and the transformation of urban space in the country today.

Since the guerrilla efforts, the democratic state has been able to penetrate and absorb social space (all space) through two primary mechanisms: 1) an allegiance to techno-bureaucratic logics (mentioned above), which have subordinated popular experiences and projected urban space (in the widest sense of the term) across the country, and 2) the use of strong political parties (namely AD and COPEI) to mediate conflict and co-opt non-party organizations through clientelistic practices (Ovalles 1987; Werz 1990; Weaver 1996), resulting in the demobilization of efforts that might have otherwise articulated into collective

action (Cariola 1995: 99). Rexene Ann Hanes de Acevedo (1984: 88) defines clientelist relations as 'transactions of exchange of dissimilar goods and services between people who have unequal status and resources.' The consequence is that

as far as these relations extend ever more into society and bind themselves, forming networks with strong vertical ties and weak or insignificant horizontal ties, it becomes more difficult, as a result, to recognize the common class interests and to form organizations whose base are social classes (ibid.).

This has particular resonance in Venezuela where popular organizations have struggled to build collective popular power and have often resorted instead to vertical relations with the state in order to meet basic needs, thus contributing to fragmented social relations within the barrios.

While neither of these strategies is necessarily unique to Venezuela (indeed, Lefebvre [1991/1974], Licha [1990], and Scott [1998] suggest that all capitalist states tend toward a techno-bureaucratic logic), and Hanes de Acevedo (1984) suggests that clientelism is common throughout Latin America), what perhaps sets Venezuela apart is its intense economic disparity (manifesting as socio-spatial segregation) combined with the acceptance of the state's role as the beneficiary and distributor of oil rents, both of which have enabled the state (often via political parties) to penetrate into all aspects of society.

The question of clientelism is most often reported by studies as a prominent characteristic of barrio organizations during the *Punto Fijo* period. This relationship can be initiated as early as the initial stages of land occupation. In an attempt to avoid removal, potential squatters

would seek out the support of a political party – usually the one in power at the time (Ray 1969: 34) – and in exchange for votes, politicians would promise that the government would protect the occupation and look after the inhabitants (ibid.: 87). Similarly, barrios were also able to negotiate with the state (via parties) to obtain community benefits, such as street infrastructure, generators, sewers and community schools, 'though doing so tentatively, incrementally and in return for votes' (Bolivar et al 2000: 11; see also Ray 1969: 8). Gaining support of one party or another amounted to a strategic decision by the *pobladores*, and this connection to party representatives often 'made more generally accessible, the channels through which the man in the street could get help from the agencies of the national and municipal government' (Peattie 1970: 64). However, this also served to both localize problems and solutions to them and to de-politicize the shared problems brought about by urban socio-spatial segregation (Fadda 1987).

As the barrios consolidated and community organizations began to form around various interests, the intensity of the party-barrio relationship left little political space outside of the dominant parties. As a result, barrios were heavily managed by the parties (Ray 1969: 92-3; Vielma & Aguero 1992: 63-8; Grohmann 1996: 52) to the extent that in a personal interview, Venezuelan scholar Nelson Freitez suggested that the idea of citizenship in Venezuela has historically been connected to a certain party or politics (personal interview, Lara State, 5 May 2009). This has created a dynamic in which a few barrio residents would become enmeshed in a series of hierarchical relationships, themselves serving as access points to the parties (and benefits) for other residents (Peattie 1970). For example, CTU activist Rosa remembers how one woman in her barrio, '*la adeca*' (the AD member), because of her party affiliation had access to subsidized milk that she would bring to the community (Caracas, personal interview, 9 May 2010). As a result, party membership bestowed a certain amount

of influence on barrio residents to the extent that, Ray (1969: 104-25) argues, some were able to rule like dictators over the community.

Even today, activists who are attempting to transform clientelistic relations (what Venezuelans often refer to as *asistencialismo*) by creating new, horizontally-oriented popular organizations<sup>40</sup> are still caught in a web of these vertical relations. CTU activist Maria explained that because of her role in starting the CTU in her barrio people look to her as a figurehead with access to resources and they go to her house for support. 'I'm not interested in being a politician or tricking people into thinking that I can get them something... [for me] everyone is the same and treated the same. Some people promote themselves, want power and promise stuff. I've never done that... but I've still had many struggles in the community' (Caracas, personal interview, 14 May 2010). The struggle to build relationships of horizontality and collectivity, though based on common territorial identity and *convivencia* (shared daily experience) (personal interviews with Pedro, Caracas, 18 May 2010, and Carlos, Lara State, 10 April 2010), is frustrated by the history of social relationships in Venezuelan barrios.

One of the most significant ways that the parties attempted to co-opt popular organization and institutionalize conflict was to create social organizations that were 'designed and implemented by the state with the support of the political parties' (Ochoa Arias 2000: 168; Gómez Calcaño 1987: 30). The most important of these was the *Asociación de Vecinos* promoted by the AD party. The *Asociación* sprouted up independently as primarily middle-class organizations protecting residential areas from commercialization (Salamanca 1998: 368; Crisp & Levine 1998: 41). However, this was a momentary independence as the

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<sup>40</sup> See Chapter 4.

*Asociaciones* were quickly co-opted by the political parties and institutionalized by the state through a law requiring communities to create their own *Asociación*. The *Asociación* was predated by the short-lived *Juntas de Barrios* (Barrio Committees), a direct arm of the AD party at the beginning of the democracy. The *Juntas* collapsed in the early 1960s, due to the outright rejection of voters, but according to Luis Salamanca (ibid.: 372), they did serve to socialize the barrios into clientelistic relationships with the government and the parties. Turning to a new organization, the state was interested in using the *Asociaciones* as a way to 'counteract the influence of the revolutionary [guerrilla] movement' in the barrios (Gómez Calzaño 1987: 30) and absorb and channel radical political protest. By 1990 there were 15,000 *Asociaciones* (Crisp & Levine 1998: 41-2). Despite their numbers and their longevity, the *Asociaciones* were never very effective, hamstrung as they were by the dominance of the political parties with little political leverage to organize for more than basic services.<sup>41</sup> They did, however, serve as a platform for political learning.

While clientelism does not prohibit collective action nor does it necessarily fail to produce beneficial outcomes for barrio communities, Venezuelan historian Iraida Vargas-Arenas (2007: 45) explains that one of the consequences of clientelism is not just a lack of autonomy from the state but the kind of subjectivities it creates. Party-clientelism affected collective communities in the structure and management of their social organizational forms and in the development of social values. The initial populism of the *Punto Fijo* pact, during the decades between the 60s and part of the 70s, managed to use party-clientelism to satisfy social demands in an individual manner. During the 80s, this clientelism fundamentally impacted the neighborhood organizations that began to appear around that time, deflecting the search for and implementation of collective solutions to social problems in

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<sup>41</sup> Based on personal interviews with *Asociación* participants from *parroquias* Antimano (29 April 2009, 21 July 2009), La Vega (17 July 2009), and Santa Rosalia (9 August 2009).

favor of satisfying personal individual needs (Cariola 1995; Altez 1996).

The dominant characteristic among popular organizations from the 1960s to the 1980s then was one of localized political action centered on individual needs and channelled through political parties to state institutions (Ray 1969: 74; Peattie 1970; Grohmann 1996; Altez 1996). Time and again, CTU activists who have lived in the barrio all their lives talk about the previous social separation between themselves and their neighboring barrios, how they had never visited each other or known of their struggles until recent years. Thus, the social relations perpetuated by political parties of the state and the socio-spatial segregation of the city largely resulted in fragmented social relations between and within barrio communities that limited their capacity to articulate at other scales (e.g. regional or national) (Cariola 1995: 99) and to organize for significant urban transformation beyond the resolution of immediate needs (Altez 1996).

As mentioned in Chapter 1, urban movement research from the 1980s and 1990s often stops there in its analysis and concludes that urban movements have little revolutionary potential because they are mostly concerned with issues of consumption and limited by their territorial affiliations (see Castells 1983; Schuurman & van Naerssen 1989; Altez 1996). Following on from the theory developed in Chapter 2, however, this research assumes that there are always social relations and lived experiences that seep out beyond dominant power relations (Lefebvre 1991/1974: 26). This is the 'lived space' that, though perhaps hidden, carries with it revolutionary potential. In future chapters a close examination of practices that emanate from lived space is linked to the CTUs' ability to construct popular power and transform urban space.

For these reasons it is important to recognize here not only the fragmentation experienced in barrio communities throughout the *Punto Fijo* period but also the other social practices, however nascent, that have served as the basis from which to construct a basis of solidarity and popular power. In the case of Venezuela, one can see these sediments of social relations in the cultural and athletic groups that were often organized for and by young people in the 1970s and 1980s. These organizations are often cited by current activists as having been important for collective organization and political learning 'in the streets and with the people,' as one activist put it (Luis, barrio activist, Caracas, personal interview, 1 June 2010) and outside the influence of political parties (see also Ponce 1995; Calzadilla, et al 1999: 138-9; Barrio Union 2003). What made them potentially revolutionary was that, aside from serving as a clandestine meeting point for political organization, cultural organizations within Venezuelan barrios sought to recuperate and practice diverse cultural traditions thus engaging in a politics rooted in the lived experience of barrio inhabitants.<sup>42</sup>

It has already been mentioned that the country's modernization project led to attempts to 'blot out' traditional cultural practices found in the barrios (Sanoja Obediente & Vargas-Arenas 2008). Historian Iraida Vargas-Arenas (2007: 2) explains that since the 19<sup>th</sup> century dominant classes have sought to deny popular classes' autonomy and 'the capacity to make decisions for their own social interests and aspirations.' Since the discovery of oil to the present day, this 'democratic denial' has been supported by reasoning that suggests that 'the conduct of the Venezuelan popular classes is characterized by an innate indiscipline, which [impedes] the development of real participation in civil society' (ibid.). More recently, the state and dominant classes engaged in a discourse that imagined Venezuela as a

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<sup>42</sup> It is notable that barrio residents today who actively support the opposition parties are re-activating these forms of activity, such as hosting movie nights for young people and organizing sports teams and cultural groups as a way of both encouraging moral behavior and engaging the barrio in a political critique of the Chávez government.

homogeneous culture, all part of one collective 'without distinctions of race, social condition, ethnicity, gender, ideology or age' (Crisp & Levine 1998: 29; Vargas-Arena 2006: 76), thereby further delegitimizing cultural traditions and distinct modes of living found in the barrios.

In this context, cultural practices have been part of the popular classes' repertoire of resistance since the 1800s, and during the economic crisis of the 1980s became a foundation from which to critique the state and construct new democratic practices based on reciprocity, collectivity, and autonomy from the state.<sup>43</sup> Though still facing many of the aforementioned obstacles in terms of heterogeneous, fragmented social relations (Cariola 1995: 99), as early as the 1980s several researchers noted that cultural groups had the potential to form the basis for an alternative popular politics that could put into question the dominant state-led development model and lead to radical transformation of the 'urban problematic' (Mosonyo 1982: 258; Gómez Calcaño 1987: 14). Such a prediction has not been entirely unfounded as cultural practices and demands for recognition of distinct legitimate modes of living are important aspects of popular power construction in today's Bolivarian Revolution and contribute to the basis of contemporary urban transformation.

### **CRISIS AND THE PEOPLE WHO TOOK THE STREET AND NEVER WENT HOME<sup>44</sup>**

The production of urban space through the aforementioned barrio social relations took shape through the intersection of other scales of political and economic struggle that also

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<sup>43</sup> López Maya and Lander (2008) demonstrate that political resistance or demand-making in the form of street protests had been a common feature of Venezuelan politics throughout the democratic period and that trends that were already established have merely continued under the Chávez presidency. Street protests documented by media do not, however, constitute the whole of political engagement, and in fact much evidence points to a change in popular politics in Venezuela, in the ways discussed above and in subsequent chapters, since the 1990s.

<sup>44</sup> Paraphrase of a quote from Margarita López Maya (2005: 11): 'Common, every-day people came out onto the street and still have not returned to their houses,' cited in Chapter 1.



contributed to the production of urban space (Massey 1993). Previous sections have discussed the import substitution industrialization (ISI) strategy that the Venezuelan state initiated in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, which with substantial subsidies through oil rents, developed alongside a model of what Venezuelans call 'state capitalism'. This section returns briefly to the political economy of the country from the 1980s onward, which after the 1989 urban uprising, has stimulated a new era of urban popular organization and an alternative kind of urban transformation from that which began during the attempts to 'modernize' Caracas.

According to Bryan Roberts (1989: 672), under the ISI development model bias towards the urban was strong (not just in Venezuela but throughout Latin America). Thus the combined impact of ISI and the democratic transition, as was mentioned above, was a dramatic increase in the urban population, the territorial expansion of urban centers largely through barrio developments, the growth of a middle-class bureaucracy (mostly located in Caracas), and the consolidation of a strong central government within the capital city. Additionally, ISI contributed to the emergence of an industrial working class and greater formal employment opportunities (Portes & Roberts 2005).

In Venezuela, the 1970s are often considered the 'golden years' thanks to the formation of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and the ensuing rise in oil prices (Martz & Myers 1986: 78-9; Santiso 2006: 193). The huge influx of oil revenues prompted President Carlos Andrés Pérez to nationalize the oil industry, thereby gaining control over the revenues, and embark on another round of industrialization.<sup>45</sup> This agenda,

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<sup>45</sup> In his famous book, *Open Veins of Latin America* (1973), Eduardo Galeano makes a specific example of the Venezuelan oil industry, pointing out that 'nationalization of basic resources doesn't in itself imply redistribution of income for the majority's benefit, nor does it necessarily endanger the power and privileges of the dominant minority. In Venezuela the economy of waste and extravagance continues

however, began to fall apart due to the decline of oil prices, mismanagement of later administrations, and a growing national debt (Ellner 2008), all of which plunged Venezuela into a severe economic crisis at the beginning of the 1980s. Other Latin American countries, under similar situations of indebtedness, had already been facing economic crisis and default.

In 1983, on a day commonly known as 'Black Friday', the Venezuelan currency was devalued, sending the economy into a tailspin. By the end of the decade, inflation rose to more than 40 per cent and the value of the currency continued to slide (Hellinger 1991: 129). Like other Latin American countries, Venezuela began initiating policy changes in an attempt to reduce debt and inflation and to stave off a severe austerity program that would force the abandonment of the country's state capitalism model and the adoption of neoliberalism instead. To this end, in 1988, at the peak of the crisis, Carlos Andrés Pérez was again elected president after promising to reject a Structural Adjustment Package (SAP) that would usher in neoliberal reforms by further slashing state welfare expenditure, ending subsidies and privatizing state-owned companies. However, on 16 February 1989, after only a few weeks in office, Pérez announced the adoption of the SAP, commonly called '*el paquete*' (the package) in Venezuela (Stephany 2006).<sup>46</sup> *El paquete*, which was designed in order to meet foreign debt obligations, meant 'an enormous transfer of wealth from the population to the State... But its destination was to pay the debt. In reality, *el paquete* promised an enormous transfer of wealth from the population to the international banks, in which the State played the role of intermediary' (ibid.: 70).

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intact...' (ibid.: 268).

<sup>46</sup> Pérez was not the first president to try to implement austerity measures in the country. Presidents had been attempting to do so since 1978 (Hellinger 1991: 147). See Hellinger (ibid.: 191) for more on the austerity measures.

The effects of *el paquete* and the financial crisis in general were most severely felt in the first half of the 1990s. By the early 1990s, unemployment and informal employment had greatly increased in Venezuela (Portes & Hoffman 2003) and the average income was equivalent to 1960 levels (Wilpert 2003: 104). Most significantly, the economic crisis and subsequent neoliberal-oriented policy initiatives had a dramatically greater negative impact on the majority lower classes (including those formally employed) than on the richest. Though income disparity in the country had been 'virtually static', from 1962 to 1981 (Lovera 1989: 101), suggesting that the Golden years did not do anything to reduce disparity, the economic crisis further exacerbated disparity between the rich and poor (Roberts 2003: 50; Portes & Hoffman 2003).<sup>47</sup> Even in comparison to other Latin American countries that were also facing crisis Venezuela's economic disparity reached horrendous proportions: 'the richest 5 per cent of the population consumed the largest percentage and the poorest 20 per cent had the smallest percentage of income among seven semi-industrialized Latin American nations' (Hellinger 1991: 135), making Venezuela the country with the largest economic disparity in Latin America. Additionally, by the 1990s Venezuela had fallen behind all other Latin American countries on social expenditure as a percentage of GDP (Parker 2005: 47).<sup>48</sup> Of course, much of these declining real wages and growing disparities were most intensely experienced in urban areas, where residents continued to find shelter in self-produced housing, especially as the state's capacity to build housing decreased and urban land speculation continued to push up the cost of formal housing (Lovera 1989: 105). A fallout of these economic pressures has been the significant increase in urban violence, especially in Caracas, that continues to be one of the primary concerns of urban residents in Venezuela today (Portes & Hoffman 2003: 66-70; Briceño-León 2007)

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<sup>47</sup> In 1981, the share of wealth for the poorest 40 per cent was 19.1 per cent and for the wealthiest 10 per cent it was 21.8 per cent. By 1997 those numbers had shifted to 14.7 per cent and 32.8 per cent, respectively (Roberts 2003: 50).

<sup>48</sup> For more on the economic crisis, see Hellinger (1991) and Ellner (2008).

Even before the announcement of the austerity program the two political parties had been losing support and the democratic character of the state was in question (Fadda 1987; Hellinger 1991; López Maya 1999). As in neighboring countries, 'economic crisis thus begat political crisis as the social structure of accumulation unravelled' (Robinson 1996: 150). A series of scandals including corruption at the highest levels of political office, growing anger regarding the impunity enjoyed by elites, the assassination of innocent civilians by the armed forces, and rising living costs all contributed to mobilizing protests across the country starting in January 1989 (López Maya 1999; Stephany 2006). The state's ability to channel and institutionalize conflict was fading away with the economic outlook (Lovera 1989: 110).

With disgust in his voice, one activist remembers his own moment of political awakening around this time:

There was so much injustice, so much injustice that it seemed as if the whole world saw injustice as something normal... injustice and impotence of the everyday [to do anything about it]. It privileged clientelism [*asistencialismo*]. It privileged politicking. And in a way that got me completely involved in everything to do with popular organization – in order to generate proposals to put back on its feet everything that the Right had destroyed. So many lies...' (Luis, barrio activist, Caracas, personal interview, 1 June 2010).

Similar to the words of the young activist who lamented that the transition to democracy in 1958 had not brought about revolutionary change (see above), Luis's anger (his word) towards a democratic system that had failed to meet its promises to provide benefits to everyone reflected a growing criticism in Venezuela and across Latin America in response to

the economic crisis and proposed austerity measures (Pearce 2004: 484; Margheritis & Pereira 2007: 26; Beasley-Murray et al 2009: 325; Luna & Filgueira 2009: 376).

Finally, on 27 February 1989, disillusionment met with concrete need and sparked into widespread protest. On that day, a Monday, students and workers arrived in the early morning hours at bus stops around Caracas to go to school and work, only to find that transport fares had more than doubled as a result of increased petroleum prices (one of the elements of *el paquete*). In response, students began taking over the buses, setting them on fire and blocking the streets.<sup>49</sup> As protests spread across the city, people from the barrios took to the streets, looting buildings and organizing spontaneous marches (Hellinger 2001: 191-2; López Maya 2003). By the next day, the protests had spread to other cities, and the government responded by deploying the military to detain and, if necessary, shoot down the rioters. As one witness told me, National Guard vehicles were pointed up towards the hills of the barrios and people were shot standing inside their own homes (Agustín, popular educator, Caracas, personal interview, 27 June 2008; see also Ramia 1990: 82; López Maya 2003: 129; Stephany 2006). Another witness remembers watching his friend being gunned down and, later, the shock of seeing so many bodies carted into the city morgue as he sat with her body (Caracas, personal conversation, 29 May 2009). Anywhere between 300 and 3,000 people<sup>50</sup> were killed during the week-long riots, commonly known as the *caracazo* (Hellinger 1991: 193; López Maya 2003:129-130; Ramia 1990: 111; Vargas-Arenas 2007: 123).

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<sup>49</sup> It is interesting to note an argument made by Venezuelan sociologist Ricardo Briceño-León (2006) who suggests that Venezuelan identity involves a belief that as citizens they are direct owners of the oil and deserve (by birthright) its economic benefits. With this understanding in mind, it is perhaps not surprising that a rise in petroleum prices and its knock-on effects triggered such an immediate, violent response.

<sup>50</sup> The government at the time claimed that about 300 people were killed. However, independent investigators have estimated that as many as 3,000 were killed or disappeared. Part of the discrepancy is attributable to the fact that many families were too afraid to come forward and officially report their loved ones as dead or missing (Hellinger 1991: 193).

Many analysts and activists alike mark this event as a watershed moment in Venezuela's recent history (Hellinger 1991; Ellner & Hellinger 2003: 7; Briceño-León 2007: 90), especially for barrio inhabitants (Grohmann 1996: 36). What had started out as a series of student protests<sup>51</sup> against increased transportation costs turned into a full-blown national protest affecting most urban areas of the country (López Maya 2003: 128). Interestingly, according to Keta Stephany (2006), the *caracazo* was not specifically a protest against the SAP. It was only later in April when popular protests specifically targeted the austerity program introduced by Pérez. The *caracazo* was one of many protests related to neoliberal restructuring across Latin America. The Venezuelan government, meanwhile, oscillated during this time between unresponsiveness and repression.<sup>52</sup>

The *caracazo* may have been the first highly visible event that signalled a tide of change in Venezuela, but it was certainly not the last. On 4 February 1992, Hugo Chávez, a young member of the military at the time, orchestrated a coup attempt. Though unsuccessful as a political takeover, the announcement that Chávez made over television and radio when he asked his fellow soldiers to lay down their arms because the fight was over '*por ahora*' (for now) (Bartley & O'Brian 2002), announced to the country that change was still on the horizon. Chávez's statement made him an instant hero of *el pueblo*. A second coup attempt later that same year was much more violent and was met by rapid and brutal state

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<sup>51</sup> Student movements have been an enduring component in Venezuela's protest history, playing an important role in the establishment of the *trienio*, the overthrow of Pérez Jiménez, and in the decade leading up to the *caracazo*, often championing the cause of the poor (Ellner 1985; López Maya 2000). Students continue to be highly mobilized during the Bolivarian Revolution and the Central University of Venezuela is now a site of struggle between students and between pro- and anti-revolution actors.

<sup>52</sup> In an interview just months after the *caracazo*, when asked if this kind of event could happen again, President Andrés Pérez said, 'You have seen me during these recent months with a peace, a complete serenity with the handling of the situation. This, despite the personal anguish with which I have to live. It's that it motivates me to create and look for new initiatives to solve these problems. Up to now I can say that I feel satisfied that we have accomplished our searched for objective' (Ramia 1990: 45). During the next three years, he was to experience two attempted coups against his government, after which he was removed from office by a vote of no confidence by the National Assembly (see also Martz 1995: 43-47).

repression. This repression was not only exacted against the coup participants but was widely felt. For example, after the first failed coup attempt, *barrio La Independencia* in *parroquia* La Vega organized a local committee of people who were prepared to rapidly take the role of coordinating the *barrio* in the event of a central government collapse. They were prepared to produce their own food (*arepas*, the Venezuelan equivalent of bread), teach their own children, and mount their own local council. Within six hours of the second coup d'état the *barrio* had in fact launched their plan. Within hours the pro-government military raided the *barrio*, suppressed the autonomous organization and killed about fifteen people in the process (personal conversation, *barrio* resident, La Vega, Caracas, 19 June 2009).

The ongoing economic crisis and the declining credibility of the party-dominated democratic system, combined with greater organization from the popular classes,<sup>53</sup> led to an electoral revolution in 1998 that witnessed the disintegration of the two traditional political parties and resulted in the election of former coup-leader Hugo Chávez with 56 per cent of the vote. Per his campaign promises, he immediately called for the election of a constitutional assembly which wrote a new constitution (Maingon et al 2000), thus marking what would be the beginning of the so-called Bolivarian Revolution. Various CTU activists reported to me that one of the most important calls of the revolution, from the mouth of Chávez, has been '*organízense*' – 'organize yourselves'. Relying on lessons learned from struggles during the 1990s, the CTUs have become one example of the popular organizations that are attempting to organize themselves for the transformation of urban

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<sup>53</sup> Though there was certainly growing articulation among *barrio* inhabitants, it would be unwise to overstate the extent to which they were consistently and coherently organized around a particular political agenda. From his experience in *parroquia* Petare, CTU activist Ricardo says, 'We went out in '89, but there wasn't anything more, or at least it was just for that moment... It wasn't a politically organized leap. We didn't take advantage of the moment. That's why when the coup happened, there was little organization to support it... That's why we [now] say that all spaces should be spaces for [political] formation and organization. Because our experience shows us that when we don't take the opportunity to organize ourselves we become divided; each one goes their own way' (Caracas, personal interview, 15 April 2010).

space and the right to the city.

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter has argued that the city, especially Caracas, has been an important place in the history of Venezuela. In the words of Ésteban Emilio Mosonyo (1982: 268), 'Caracas is the product of a prolonged sequence of collective sedimentations and a long series of historical projects, the majority frustrated, but which have left – nevertheless – indelible footprints of their existence.' These footprints include those left by colonial land relations, modernization projects and the techno-bureaucratic state, the flow of oil rents and the resultant burgeoning population, the political parties of the *Punto Fijo* period, and the physical and social scars of economic and political crisis during the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Barrio communities have long been subjected to the socio-spatial segregation of the city, one of the most visible outcomes of Venezuela's socio-economic-political history. As a result, the barrios have often fallen into the interstices of Venezuelan social structure: not completely urban or rural; not one economic class or another; illegal but somehow not; essential to the growth of the city but segregated from that city. As living evidence of a failed modernization agenda that was championed by various Venezuelan governments from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present period, barrio communities faced a techno-bureaucratic state that sought to repress, co-opt and channel political conflict and autonomous organization, as well as suppress popular cultures and knowledges. Such a history of struggle suggests, in accordance with Lefebvre (1991/1974), that the transformation of urban space through the articulation of popular power involves more than just material possession of the land.



Yet, as James Scott (1998: 143) reminds us, 'despite the attempts by urban planners toward designing and stabilizing the city, it escapes their grasp; it is always being reinvented and inflected by its inhabitants.' It is in this way that barrio inhabitants have also produced the city – from the moment of land occupation and the construction of *ranchos* to resistance against eviction and the organization of cultural groups. Today, many of the popular organizations of the Bolivarian Revolution, including the Urban Land Committees,<sup>54</sup> trace their political ancestry to these barrio-based organizations.

While for many in the popular classes the Chávez presidency opens up the opportunity for new urban social relations to be produced, what this chapter argues is that the Bolivarian Revolution is a process that is based on the sediments of urban spatial organization, power relations, and political practices of the past. Rather than representing a rupture from historical power relations, as the Chávez government is eager to claim, new, emerging political practices are interwoven with the historical characteristics of barrio organizations and their relationship to the state. Furthermore, these emerging political practices draw on historical social relations that, despite their some-times limiting effects on popular organizations (e.g. localism), are being transformed into political tools for barrio communities. As shall be discussed in the following chapters, it is in organizations like the Urban Land Committees where one finds experimentation with new political practices that build on these lived historical experiences and that, in turn, are contributing to the transformation of urban space in the country.

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<sup>54</sup> See Chapter 4.

## Chapter 4

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### **THE TRANSFORMATION OF SPATIAL PRACTICES AND NEW GEOGRAPHIES OF POPULAR POWER**

*¡La Tierra es un derecho, no una mercancía!*

*[Land is a right, not a commodity!]*

Venezuelan Urban Land Committee Mantra

About 25 women and men, dressed in red shirts with 'CTU' written in white across the front, piled into the metro at the Capitolio Station in the old city center of Caracas. As the doors of the metro shut one woman, Alma, started chanting, 'C-, C-, C-T-U!' Others joined in, laughing and rapping on the hard plastic seats of the metro. They were coming from a televised conference with National Assembly members who were about to introduce the Urban Land Regularization Reform Bill. A team of ten Urban Land Committee (CTU) activists had been working with these national representatives and several state institutions to write the reform bill and now, in the summer of 2009 – after several years, various marches and many meetings – it was going to be introduced for the first round of discussion in the Assembly. More than 100 CTU activists from nearby Caracas had come to attend the conference. The mood was attentive, passionate, and jovial, an attitude that was carried into the metro and to the debriefing discussion afterwards.

During the conference, Juan Carlos, one of the founders of the Pioneers, publicly spoke about the significance of the reform proposal.

This document is conceived from popular debate; it is the synthesis of

popular debate. It's not a law that a lawyer had drawn up somewhere over there... No, on the contrary, it's a document of synthesis. Because as Urban Land Committees we have been – since we were born as a popular movement – taking the political offensive, the popular legislative initiative. We see ourselves as subjects – not only legal subjects fighting for what others decide... We have been political subjects, revolutionary subjects that construct popular politics and drive it forward. And for us, the legal framework is only *one* of the spaces where we are pushing the struggle... because we are also mobilizing, we are working in other political arenas...'

(National Assembly, Caracas, 27 May 2009, emphasis in original)

While the Urban Land Committees were formally born out of Presidential Decree 1666, they have emerged as an urban popular movement (García-Guadilla 2006; Wilpert 2007) that struggles for the transformation of the city through the construction and exercise of popular power. Urban transformation is partly being attempted through a strategy of urban land redistribution, which has principally focused on obtaining land titles for the millions of barrio residents that illegally occupy state- and privately-owned land. Though Venezuela is just one of various Latin American countries to undertake urban land redistribution, the Venezuelan process of issuing land titles is unique in that it entails a significant level of involvement by barrio residents. For several years after the initiation of the 2002 Presidential Decree, the organization of thousands of CTUs and the execution of the technical work that is required to apply for land title were driven by barrio residents themselves.

The experience of collectively organizing such a significant project has led to the shaping of a new political subject and a political agenda that is not limited to land title, nor to legislative

interests. Rather, as Juan Carlos points out, the movement has grown to engage in a range of political arenas, from the household to international scales. Additionally, the CTU movement is an example of an ever-evolving political project to rupture dominant urban power relations and produce a 'socialist' city.<sup>1</sup> Thus the answer to the question about how popular power strategies lead to the transformation of urban space involves a variety of spatial scales, and strategies are changing over time. The 2006 Urban Land Regularization Law, and later the reform of that law that was eventually passed in 2011, reflect some of the permanent debate and continuous political construction that the CTU movement embraces as part of its political practice. Again, in the same speech at the National Assembly, Juan Carlos was met with applause when he described the ongoing evolution of the movement.

I remember the first time I went to the [Caracas] Metropolitan Assembly [of CTUs] in 2002. When I got there the [Urban Land Regularization] Law was being discussed, and still we are discussing the Law. And in two years we'll be discussing the Law because the Urban Land Committees have to be a flexible body that changes!

What Juan Carlos means is that the law (and the movement) must be continually adapted to changing circumstances and deeper understandings of what transforming the urban requires.

While Juan Carlos's speech highlights the political evolution of the CTU movement over multiple scales, a focal point of this chapter, the conference at the National Assembly also revealed two significant tensions that the movement experiences which will be discussed in this and subsequent chapters. The first is the subtle (and sometimes not-so-subtle)

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<sup>1</sup> See epigraph, Chapter 3.

competition for power between popular organizations and state institutions. For example, while CTU activists were distributing their version of the reform bill, the Assemblymembers who were sponsoring the bill distributed their own version, what someone later told me was a more technical piece of legislation that left out some of the popular power elements that the movement considers essential. The question about why two documents were being circulated and debated was only raised at the end of the conference and in the evaluation afterwards when a CTU activist from the state of Aragua reflected that the Assemblymembers were facing elections and might be using the movement for those ends.

The second tension illustrated at the conference is the variances within the movement itself which began to show as questions about the two versions of the reform bill were raised. Fault-finding questions from CTU activists in the audience were directed at the 10-person CTU commission that had been writing the reform bill, suggesting that the proposal had not been as widely debated as was publicly claimed, or at least, had not been fully understood and approved, especially by those outside of Caracas. Additionally, after the conference, reservations were expressed about why Juan Carlos, a self-proclaimed Pioneer, had acted as the spokesperson for the CTUs. Again, these kinds of concerns were raised by activists outside of Caracas, rendering visible the uneven geographies within the movement.

With these various themes in mind, the chapter embarks on the exploration of the primary research question of this project, namely how CTU strategies to construct popular power are transforming urban space in Venezuela. The chapter first investigates the significance of Presidential Decree 1666, juxtaposing the decree with other land tenure processes that are dominant in the global South. The next section then looks at how Urban Land Committees organize themselves at a local scale, suggesting that these organizational strategies amount

to a transformation of what Lefebvre (1991/1974) called 'spatial practices'. Underpinning this discussion is an analysis of how the CTUs are attempting to shape urban space by contesting the terms of urban segregation through claims to barrio land ownership, cultural identity, and local popular knowledge, what Chapter 2 identified as '*conocer*'. After a discussion about the role of state institutions in the land tenure process, the chapter then turns to an analysis of how the CTUs are enacting a territorial politics. This idea is extended into the next sections where it is argued that the process of organizing individual CTUs carries with it the fundamentals for articulating a national popular movement based in *autogestión*. Here the chapter begins an argument, which will carry on in Chapter 5, regarding how the CTUs have pushed beyond the decree, have articulated at wider scales, and ultimately consolidated into a national popular movement. While the emphasis in Chapter 5 will be on the importance of what I am calling 'collective lived space', this chapter focuses on the way that the CTU movement is transforming urban space by creating new scales of popular articulation, an uncommon feature in the history of barrio-based organizations. The chapter also addresses some of the factors that limit the CTU movement's capacity to transform urban space, primarily the effect of uneven historical geographies on the movement both in terms of the movement's internal articulation and in terms of state institutions.

## **DECREE 1666**

In February 2002, weeks before the infamous coup of 11 April that saw the removal of the Venezuelan President and his triumphant return two days later, President Chávez issued Decree 1666. The decree mandates that municipalities and other state institutions begin issuing titles on publicly-owned land to residents who have occupied the land for ten or more years. In addition, the Decree creates two important institutions within the

regularization process. The first is the *Oficina Técnica Nacional para la Regularización de la Tenencia de la Tierra Urbana* (OTN, National Technical Office for the Regularization of Urban Land Tenancy) (Decree No. 1666, Article 2). Though the office did not actually open until 2004, the OTN is charged with initiating the regularization process, registering Urban Land Committees, and providing coordination between state institutions involved in the titling process. The OTN cannot itself sign over land tenure but works with other land-owning entities (mainly national state institutions and local municipalities) to do so. The second institution is the Urban Land Committees, who are barrio-based organizations that under the decree are meant to 1) foster public participation in the development of the Urban Land Regularization Law (which would eventually be passed in 2006), 2) identify the boundaries of their community and compile an inventory of housing, 3) write a *Carta del Barrio* (Barrio Charter), and 4) begin discussion on how to improve the barrios (Decree No. 1666, Article 8, Section 3).

Decree 1666 marked a new course for Venezuela's agenda for the urban barrios. As we saw in the last chapter, land has been a focal point of urban struggle since the colonial period. Who has access to urban land, under what conditions (e.g. slave, squatter or owner), and where that land is located have been principle questions within this contest and have contributed to the socio-spatial segregation in urban Venezuela. In the 75 years leading up to the decree, Venezuelan governments focused on either the elimination of barrios, the production of state-led housing development projects, or more recently on barrio rehabilitation, which includes providing services such as running water, moving people to safer terrain, and repairing existing housing. Given the persistence of various governments to build housing for the poor, it is surprising then that Venezuelan government reports suggest that 70 per cent of all housing in Venezuela has been built by residents themselves,

20 per cent by the private market, and only 10 per cent by the state (FEGS 2006).<sup>2</sup>

Not only does this raise questions about the effectiveness of state-led housing construction,<sup>3</sup> it speaks volumes about the productive capacity of barrio residents – something that has been largely overlooked or undermined by formal institutions but that the CTU movement uses as a platform from which to assert its demands for the right to the city. Even the recent 1999 Housing Subsystem and Housing Policy Law which did try to '[expand] the vision for housing beyond just buildings' to 'physical rehabilitation of barrio zones', did so through highly technocratic means that lacked community involvement (FEGS 2006). Instead of drawing on the documented knowledge that barrio communities have about housing and infrastructure construction (Rosas Meza 2004), according to the FEGS report, the law in practice 'established dependency relationships [with the state] and generated little organizational autonomy [in the barrios]' (FEGS 2006).

Such an astounding situation, which suggests that urban residents are the primary producers of urban space in Venezuela but are often subject to state cooptation, challenges the easily-assumed view that 'the main enemy [of urban popular movements] is often the state *through its failure to provide adequate housing and other urban infrastructure*' (Roberts 1989: 684, emphasis added). Rather, perhaps the failure has more to do with the state's misuse of funds in efforts for which it is clearly not up to the task or its attempts to undermine urban inhabitants' control over their own territory.

Alternatively, the decree carves a small but significant pathway for the development of popular power because it places community participation and local knowledges, such as

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<sup>2</sup> Others indicate that up to 50 per cent has been built by barrio residents (García-Guadilla 2006: 2).

<sup>3</sup> Which often involves corruption (Myers 1978), heavy bureaucratic red tape, and given the decidedly ambiguous if not conflictual relationship that the state has had with the barrio, a lack of political will.



community-produced data, histories and modes of living, at the center of the regularization process.<sup>4</sup> The very nature of community participation, particularly the practices of the Urban Land Committees, opens up the process to a comprehensive conception of regularization that includes title and barrio improvements, and recognizes the 'cultural processes of occupation and the significance of space as a function of a population's way of life' (FEGS 2006).

This orientation towards the regularization process was not a foregone conclusion both because of Venezuela's own history with top-down approaches to housing policy, as already described here and in Chapter 3, and the highly charged debate about land regularization that has emerged during the Chávez presidency. This debate initially manifested itself along two fronts. First, in the months following Chávez's inauguration in 1999, the national opposition newspapers began running stories about land invasions in Caracas. These invasions, the reports implied, were in response to Chávez's supposed antipathy toward individual property rights. It was claimed that invasions had increased, sparking worry about the security of private property.<sup>5</sup> However, empirical research by Teolinda Bolívar Barreto et al (2000) revealed that land invasions continued during the Chávez presidency at the same rate as in previous years. In fact, it was the media coverage about these events that had increased, not the occupations themselves. The opposition used the urban land occupations to state their opposition to the president and as an example of how the country would

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<sup>4</sup> Paradoxically, the implementation of the 2006 Urban Land Regularization Law seemed to close down some of this space. See below.

<sup>5</sup> An ongoing discourse of the opposition is that regarding private property. On more than one occasion news announcements have claimed that Chávez is preparing to take away second homes or limit each person to one bedroom in order to house Cuban doctors in the extra rooms. None of these things have happened.

disintegrate under Chávez (ibid.: 37).<sup>6</sup>

This attention on the illegality of the barrios provoked a public debate about urban land tenure where the issue was also engaged on a legal front. *Primero Justicia* (Justice First), the new opposition party formed by remnants of *Acción Democrática* (AD) and *Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente* (COPEI), proposed a land regularization law in 2001, before Decree 1666 was issued (Parker 2005: 47). This proposal was based on Peruvian Hernando de Soto's (1989, 2000) theory (Antillano 2005; Wilpert 2003: 113) which has popularized the idea of land titling for the purpose of integrating barrio residents into the global economy through the real estate market. According to Bolívar Barreto et al (2000: 22, emphasis added), this orientation to land ownership diverged from 'the current discussion of the regularization of land tenure *in the barrios* [which] is more pertinent to barrio improvement and consolidation than to the problem of property... the latter is rather more an instrument, a means to facilitate a planned and coherent consolidation of the barrios...'

However, given the prominence of de Soto's work in Latin America and the fact that it was named during this debate in Venezuela, it is worth spending a moment reviewing his principle ideas so as to highlight how the decree and the CTU process diverges from his orientation to land regularization. In his two most well-known books *The Other Path* (1989) and *The Mystery of Capital* (2000) de Soto argues that the people of the global South are poor, not because they lack entrepreneurial skills or are slow to adapt to new technologies, but because they do not have capital. What they do have are their homes, which without proper legal documentation of ownership merely represent 'dead' capital. He estimates that

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<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that this critique is ongoing and reaching a crescendo since the early part of 2011 as the national government has begun expropriating vacant or under-used, *privately-owned* urban plots and has publicly supported the occupation of such land.

this 'dead' capital amounts to more than \$9.3 billion, equivalent to many times the amount of international aid sent to the global South (de Soto 2000: 30-37). De Soto's solution is simple: pass new laws that grant barrio residents land title and regulate the legal system so that these new laws are enforceable. According to de Soto, land titles would allow barrio residents to access credit and enter into the real estate market. Not only that, the state would also benefit from land regularization because, he argues, informal settlements are more costly than formal ones (de Soto 1989: 19, 137-42). In his more recent work de Soto takes this argument further saying that legal property ownership is the reason that capitalism has 'succeeded' in the West and 'failed' everywhere else (de Soto 2000).

De Soto's research opened up a significant line of enquiry into the economic benefits of land regularization – quite frankly a more enticing argument for national governments and international institutions than the moral or political argument that poor people need housing security (though this argument is still seen as an important reason for regularization) (Fernandes 2002) – and certainly in line with the neoliberal push for the global South to enter more deeply into the formal free market. As a result, de Soto's viewpoint has been translated into policy prescriptions by various Latin American countries, such as Argentina, El Salvador and de Soto's own Peru, and has been taken up by the World Bank. However, his ideas have also been pointedly critiqued. These critiques include an overestimation of 'dead' capital in the Global South; the assumption that barrio residents actually want title (Ward 2003; Irazábal 2009); the explicit rejection of cultural considerations (Fernandes & Smolka 2004); the fact that barrio residents are part of the real estate market with or without legal title (Fernandes 2002); the false assumption that land title equals access to credit through financial institutions or changes the financial situation of barrio inhabitants in some other way (Fernandes 2002; Ward 2003); the failure to consider other forms of

property ownership, such as collective ownership, and upgrading as an avenue of improving quality of life (Fernandes 2002; Mukhija 2005; Irazábal 2009); the failure to consider the process of regularization (e.g. resident participation or not) as a determining factor in effectiveness (Fernandes & Smolka 2004). To this I would add that de Soto deals with the issue of urban socio-spatial segregation in an a-spatial way by only focusing on the economic consequences of land tenure. By overlooking other forms of power that are implicated in socio-spatial segregation he fails to consider that dominant power relations must be transformed in order to 'integrate' (de Soto's interest) the barrios with other parts of the city.

As an alternative to the de Soto-inspired *Primero Justicia* legislation, Maria Cristina Iglesias, a leader in the left political party *Causa R* in the 1990s who later became the Labor Minister for the Chávez government (2002-5, 2009-present), also proposed a land regularization law at the end of 2001. However, this law failed in the Assembly. Despite its failure, Iglesias convened a group of experts and barrio activists, who had debated the idea of land tenure since the early 1990s,<sup>7</sup> to write what is now known as Presidential Decree 1666 (Michael Lebowitz, personal interview, 8 May 2009; Pedro, CTU activist, personal interview, 18 May 2010; see also Antillano 2005: 209). As a result of this collaboration, many of the decree's unique elements regarding community participation and the collective process of applying for land title were gleaned from concrete experiences of popular organization from the 1990s. 'Where de Soto and *Primero Justicia* view urban land reform as essentially a means to encourage the accumulation of capital in the barrios, Chávez's supporters see it as a path to participatory democracy and self-help in the communities' (Wilpert 2003: 113).

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<sup>7</sup> Many of these activists had experience in the *Asamblea de Barrios* (Barrio Assembly) which started in Caracas in the early 1990s. Some of these activists went on to organize the Caracas Metropolitan Assembly of CTUs and from there the larger CTU movement. See below for a discussion on the relationship between the two experiences.

Whereas de Soto argues for individual ownership, the CTU movement, supported by the Urban Land Regularization Law and its Reform Bill, is advocating for a variety of types of ownership: individual, family, social, and collective. Fernandes (2002) addresses this aspect of de Soto's theory when he says that the very nature of land ownership should not be assumed as a 'universal, a-historical, "natural" legal definition', based on a liberal Western understanding of individual property ownership. In another article with Martim Smolka (2004), Fernandes highlights this as one of the key reasons numerous land regularization attempts in Latin America have been unsuccessful. They argue that in most cases land regularization has solely focused on individual land title failing to include community-wide considerations and thereby limiting the impact that titling has on what are mostly collective problems in the barrios. Some of these problems are those physical issues mentioned in Chapter 3. Others are cultural and political in nature. For example, one of the biggest problems facing the barrios of Caracas is land speculation, the fastest-growing economy in the country, outpacing even petroleum revenues (Rodríguez 2009). For the CTU movement this is a threat to individual survival in the city, as well as, a threat to the already subordinated cultural identities of the barrios. Rather than opening up barrios to the real estate market the movement sees regularization and the possibility of different kinds of ownership as a way of protecting the barrios from land speculation (see also Schuurman 1989: 19). It recognizes land title as 'part of a comprehensive regularization process of poor urban settlements in which they incorporate themselves into the city without necessarily losing their uniqueness' (Antillano 2005: 5). As will be demonstrated through this thesis, however, the idea of 'incorporation' or 'integration' into the formal city has given way to a growing demand for the transformation of the complete city, what Lefebvre (1996/1968) termed 'the right to the city'.

Despite a moderate popular power orientation, the decree is not without limitations that have more recently been challenged by CTU activists. First, those who invade land after the date of the issuance of the decree, 4 February 2002, have not been allowed to obtain land title (Article 9). In fact, under the 2006 Urban Land Regularization Law they were considered illegal and could be removed from the property, which was distinctly different from the 'de facto' legal position that *barrio* communities who existed before the decree enjoy.<sup>8</sup> In some cases, this demarcation between pre-2002 and post-2002 *barrio* residents has produced a type of second-class citizenry out of the new squatters, where the long-term residents reproduce dominant discourses about 'invaders' and 'illegals'.<sup>9</sup> In fact, this is a subtle tension within the *Pobladores* Movement in which the CTUs are the long-term residents and the *Pioneers* are trying to establish new communities on vacant *barrio* land (Ana, *Pobladores* Movement activist, Caracas, personal interview, 27 May 2010). However, many CTU activists, notably in Caracas and Mérida, have taken up organizing for new *barrio* communities, defending the permanency of new squatters, and expanding who qualifies for land tenure under the 2011 reform law.

Second, the decree focuses on regulating publicly-owned land, which only comprises about 50 per cent of all illegally settled urban land (Rosas Meza 2004: 280). While the legal instruments open up the possibility for titling private land, and in doing so put into question the absoluteness of private property (e.g. is it permissible to steal if I am hungry?) (Ellner 2005: 174), they do so in a way that makes the process so costly it is virtually impossible for *barrio* communities to enact (Ana María Alarcón, former director, Land Registry Office, Libertador Municipality, personal interview, 19 May 2009). The Urban Land Regularization

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<sup>8</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>9</sup> See Footnote 35, p. 43 for the political implications of these words. Several personal conversations and activities in the *barrios* of Caracas revealed this contradiction. Of course, not all CTU activists share this position. Many who are highly involved in the movement fiercely challenge this discourse both with public officials and their own neighbors.

Law of 2006 maintains these costly requirements, but the reform of the law reduces the requirements so as to open up legal tenure to more *barrio* communities.

## **THE FORMATION OF A CTU**

As has already been mentioned, the decree came at a tumultuous time in Venezuela's recent history. The national crises of 2002 and 2003 consisted of an attempted coup, a two-month petroleum strike, and a referendum against Chávez. With so much at stake at the national level, the primary distribution of land titles was left to local municipalities. A significant delay in the opening of the OTN, which was meant to be the lead state institution in the land titling process, and the subsequent Urban Land Regularization Law, left the *work* of land titling to the CTUs. Hence, from the outset, these grassroots organizations became the main driving force behind regularization in terms of both tenure and *barrio* improvements. Additionally, through the creation of autonomous assembly spaces, the CTUs engaged more with each other than with the state (Antillano 2005: 217).

The process for organizing an Urban Land Committee is underpinned by ideas of self-governance and participatory democracy – ideas that infused the writing of the decree. With an eye towards how the CTU strategies to construct popular power have transformed urban space in Venezuela, I am suggesting that the organization of CTUs as land tenure groups bore seeds of popular power (*autogestión*) principles that have contributed to transforming the *barrios*. These seeds have stimulated new spatial practices, that is, the reorganization and use of physical space, based on lived space knowledges. With this in mind, this section will briefly summarize the CTU organizational process before expounding on how this has contributed to the transformation of urban space in the *barrios*.

Each CTU is usually comprised of 200-400 families who together can petition for ownership of the land they occupy. Though in most cases the titles are held individually,<sup>10</sup> individual barrio residents are not allowed to petition for land title outside of the CTU structure. In the Metropolitan Area of Caracas there are more than 1,200 registered CTUs and almost 7,000 across the country (CTU 2009a), a number that positions the CTUs as a popular organization with the largest participant base in the country: upwards of 5 million people (García-Guadilla 2006: 1). Though only a fraction of these CTUs have been active in constructing the national popular movement, the wide dissemination of the organizational experiences (to be explained below) and the potential for mobilization is significant.

The first step in forming a CTU is to call a community assembly in order to define the geographic boundaries of the land committees in the barrio.<sup>11</sup> According to CTU members, the size and method of marking the boundaries of each *poligonal* (the geographic area of each CTU) is intended to correspond to the already-established, heterogeneous rationalities of the barrios (Antillano 2005: 215). For example, two hundred families is considered the typical number of people one personally knows in the barrio and sees on a regular basis. Additionally, these families often have a long history together; many even established themselves at the same time, if not came from the same rural location. The history and close proximity creates a shared *convivencia* (daily life) between residents that researchers have demonstrated leads to survival networks, familial ties, and unique cultural identities (Grohmann 1996; Bolívar Barreto et al 2000; CTU 2004; Das 2004). Thus the individual territories of the CTUs correspond, not just to a physical geography,<sup>12</sup> but to the history, daily life, and self-identification of its residents (Peattie 1970: 54). For example, the street La

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<sup>10</sup> There is one exception to this which will be discussed below.

<sup>11</sup> Some barrios may be comprised of several land committees.

<sup>12</sup> Oslender Ulrich's (2004) work, though, reminds us that the geography of a place influences who comes to live there, how the residents live, and the politics that emerges.



Independencia in *parroquia* La Vega is a large area that needed to be divided into several CTUs. The dividing line among them was not determined by an outside 'expert' but by the community. For them, the most natural division was indicated by a cluster of trees in the middle of the long street. Those who recognize the cluster as being 'in' their neighborhood consider themselves to be part of a unified area. Using this criterion the residents of the street decided to break into three different CTUs – the middle of which was named after the trees (Cristóbal, CTU & Pioneer Seminar, Pobladores Movement Activist School, 4 August 2009).

Once the boundary of the CTU is decided the community assembly elects seven to eight voceros/voceras (spokespeople) to do the work of registering the CTU. In theory, the team of seven or eight should work together and should be rotated every two years. In practice, however, the majority of the work usually falls to two or three people who often get re-elected after their first term, a not-uncommon occurrence in the history of barrio organizations (Peattie 1970: 66).<sup>13</sup> The first step for the spokespeople is to perform a census, compiling as much information as possible about every person in their CTU. The census serves as the basis from which to diagnose problems in the community and to make claims for barrio improvements. As a CTU activist from La Victoria, Aragua told me with pride, 'I have files this big,' miming a stack of papers about a third of a meter thick. She went on to explain that the census has served as a central tool for other community organizations because of its detail (personal conversation, 24 May 2009). It provides the data for groups like the Health Committees to push for a local health clinic or for the newer Community

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<sup>13</sup> Various interviews mentioned this situation and expressed frustration and disillusionment over their inability to sustain active involvement in the local CTU. At the same time, they also wistfully remembered the initial days of organizing the CTU when participation was high.

Councils to identify priority infrastructure needs.<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Abreu, a surveyor from the OTN, seconds the importance of the census. She also says that it is an under-utilized base of information which the government could use to establish priority needs on a regional scale (personal interview, 22 April 2009). Moreover, the process of taking a 'diagnostic' of the community has become a key practice that popular organizations<sup>15</sup> and state institutions frequently utilize in order to understand not only the needs but also the resources of the barrios.

Collecting community information is combined with another process: the writing of the *Carta del Barrio* (Barrio Charter). The Barrio Charter is meant to be written in a collective way, either by a group of residents or through interviews with a number of residents. It tells the story of the barrio, who its founders were, what its history is, what special characteristics it has, the norms by which its residents live, and the goals of the community. After it is written it must be approved by the Community Assembly as a formal declaration of the whole CTU. Though the Charter is often regarded as a disposable formality by most state institutions, CTU activists see it as the basis from which barrio communities come to understand and legitimize their history and unique identity.<sup>16</sup>

After spokespeople have been elected, a census is completed, and the Charter is written, a CTU can then register itself with the OTN. Each CTU picks a name for itself and is given a

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<sup>14</sup> For more information on the Community Councils see Harnecker (2006), García-Guadilla (2008) and Motta (2011a).

<sup>15</sup> For example, the Pioneer Camps use a census to identify the skills of the families who form the camp so that they can plan for the kinds of economic production activities that the camp can self-sustain.

<sup>16</sup> The contrasting views regarding the Charter are evidenced by the fact that very few Charters are kept on record by the OTN or the Caracas Land Registry Office. They are either not submitted as part of the *Carpeta Madre*, the completed file of each CTU, or they were not required, particularly in the early period of land titling, because they were deemed unimportant by state institutions (series of interviews with Zulma Narvaez, OTN geographer, June/July 2009).

number by the land office.<sup>17</sup> Once they are registered, the CTUs then begin the cadastral process: the mapping, surveying and numbering of each plot of land (see Photo 6, p. 160). With the support of local municipal land offices and/or the OTN, CTUs members are trained to complete these different tasks. Given the often complex organization of the barrios – up steep hillsides, filled with narrow passages, built on-top of each other – the surveying of such areas requires the integration of technical knowledge and local expertise. How are houses connected? Where do lots begin and end? Where is the access point into the *poligona*? Is there more than one exit out of it? Who owns each house? Once finished with this process, the CTU must then submit this information along with all official identification of each homeowner<sup>18</sup> to the entity that owns the property. This second process after the CTU registration is called the *levantamiento*, which has a double-meaning: 'survey' and 'uprising'.

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<sup>17</sup> Identification with the particular CTU is considerable. For example, the minutes for the Caracas Metropolitan Assembly of CTUs only indicate the name and number of the CTU, not the individual speaker. This is reflective of the importance the CTUs put on being a 'spokesperson' for their community and the connection that residents feel to their barrio location.

<sup>18</sup> This kind of information is required by the National Geography and Survey Law. The issue of identification is not straightforward in Venezuela. Up until recently, most barrio residents did not possess any form of formal identification. Under the Punto Fijo, one had to pay a fee to obtain a *cedula*, a state-issued ID. For most, the fee was too expensive and the ID was worth little as there were not many public services on offer. The Chávez regime has made an enormous effort to issue *cedulas* to everyone.

Photo 6: *Levantamiento*



Partially digital, partially hand-drawn map of CTU 000034, Barrio 5 de Julio, *parroquia* El Junquito, Caracas. The pink line indicates the boundaries of the *poligonal*. Courtesy of Land Registry Office, Libertador District.

After the *levantamiento* the land titling process under the decree and the old 2006 Urban Land Regularization Law distinguished between those that live on publicly-owned land and those that live on privately-owned land. For those on public land, once they have completed the *levantamiento*, each resident can then purchase their land for a symbolic prices that amounts to less than US\$1 per square meter, 'so it is a sale but adjusted for the social interest that this [land] transfer carries with it' (Martinez n.d.). In exchange, the local municipality or the national institution that owns the land can then deliver titles to barrio residents. It is often this last step that takes the longest because it is entirely dependent on

the will of those within the state institutions to give title or not. For example, in the state of Aragua only about 50 titles have been transferred since the process started in 2002. This despite the fact that there are dozens of CTUs organized in the state (personal interview, 11 April 2010).

For those that live on private land or land that has disputed ownership – almost 50 per cent of barrio residents in Caracas alone – the wait is much longer. Only one barrio, located in the Municipality of Chacao in the Metropolitan Area of Caracas, has successfully received title on private land. This was only made possible because the mayor used city funds to purchase the land and then re-sold it to the residents at a subsidized rate (López Mendoza 2006). In other instances, private foundations or companies, such as Coca-Cola,<sup>19</sup> have transferred the land back to the local municipalities, essentially making the land public again and allowing the residents to claim title in the aforementioned way. However, since the passage of the Urban Land Regularization Reform Bill, which streamlines the process of getting title on private land, the difficulty of obtaining title in such cases may change.

### **THE TECHNICAL LAND OFFICE: THE 'OTHER' INSTITUTION**

In light of recent years, 2002 to 2006 was a defining period for the CTU movement, in comparison to other popular organizations that were also begun by the state, and has contributed to the movement's ability to exert an independent, evolving popular politics (García-Guadilla 2008). First, the majority of CTUs had already formed by the time the

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<sup>19</sup> The area of Gramoven in Caracas used to be owned by Coca-Cola until it was transferred over to the city. It is now undergoing a much-lauded community development process which is led by the local CTUs. See Chapter 6.

Technical Land Office (OTN) was organized in 2004 (Antillano 2005: 211).<sup>20</sup> This meant that the grassroots organizations, not the national institution led the process both logistically and politically. The result was that the CTUs, especially those from the Caracas Metropolitan Assembly of CTUs, were able to influence how the OTN came to be organized. An important component of this was the hiring of Ivan Martínez, resident of *parroquia* La Vega and participant in the *Asamblea de Barrios* (a barrio-based political experience in the 1990s, see below), who was appointed as the first director of the OTN. Despite the success the CTUs managed to accumulate in the first two years after the decree and the degree of autonomy that allowed them to begin constructing a popular politics that exceeded the decree, under Martínez's leadership from 2004-2006, the OTN became a crucial institutional space for the CTUs. It allowed regional meetings to take place in its offices, supported CTU involvement in the writing of the Urban Land Regularization Law (2006), and worked to technically equip the CTUs for the *levantamiento* process. Additionally, during that period, more than 280,000 land titles were issued (Martínez n.d.). One employee of the OTN who worked there from 2004 to 2010 describes this period under Martínez as a time when the CTUs were working in partnership with the OTN, with the CTUs leading the political agenda (Caracas, personal interview, 21 July 2009).

In its first two years, the OTN was considered a stand-alone institution under the offices of the Vice President. As a result, the institution had access to resources that often went to supporting the CTU movement in terms of logistical assistance for meetings and national *encuentros* (Rosa, CTU activist, Caracas, personal interview, 9 May 2010). The OTN initiated the organization of the local cadastre cooperatives in Caracas. Most significantly and with

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<sup>20</sup> Additionally, by 2004 about 166,000 *levantamientos*, that is homes that were ready for title, were completed across the country, 40,000 in Caracas alone – all without the help of the OTN that was meant to be coordinating the process.

long-lasting effect, the OTN provided the resources to hire and train the *Equipo de Formación* (Training Team), which at its formation involved about 20 CTU activists from across the country who were trained to facilitate a popular education methodology that would enable the CTU movement to articulate at a national scale and evolve a national political agenda based on the lived experiences of barrio residents (Marcelo, CTU activist, Anzoátegui State, personal interview, 29 May 2010).<sup>21</sup>

It was not until the Urban Land Regularization Law was passed in 2006 that internal state conflicts and bureaucratic structures began to hinder regularization, which has led to an essential paralysis in the titling process.<sup>22</sup> For example, from mid-2008 to mid-2009 not a single title was issued in Caracas,<sup>23</sup> and many states have not received any titles at any point over the past nine years. While the difficulty of obtaining title on privately-owned land is well recognized and fairly straightforward, the obstacles to getting state-owned land titled to residents are increasingly complex. This is as much a problem of uneven political will across state institutions and scales of governance regarding land tenure as it is about inherited bureaucratic obstacles that, with the passage of the law in 2006, have attempted to absorb the innovative CTU practices that were so effective in the beginning years at mobilizing and facilitating the tenure process. This experience reflects a similar observation to that which Manuel Castells made in relation to the Chilean pobladores movement in the 1970s where

social innovation was not generalized: it occurred in those fields where a significant issue appeared in the social order – and insofar as the state machinery did not take over the treatment of the problem completely. It is

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<sup>21</sup> See Chapter 5.

<sup>22</sup> This might change with the new reform bill and the President's recent push for housing since the devastating floods at the end of 2010.

<sup>23</sup> This was in part due to the election of a new mayor.

this last point that explains why, during the movement's first phase, before Chile's left-wing government, socially innovative practices were much more frequent than after the elections (Castells 1979: 369).

In the first instance, land regularization is largely dependent on the sentiment of local mayors and institutional directors towards the prospect of issuing thousands of acres of land over to the dispossessed. In cases where the governorships and mayorships are held by the opposition, the result is an aggressive conflict with the CTUs who are demanding land titles. A quintessential example of this is in the municipality of Barruta, just south-east of Caracas, where the opposition mayor has resorted to intimidation and force against the local CTU activists. Even pro-Chávez governments have resisted issuing land title, choosing instead to sell the land at market value to any willing buyer or, in a less hostile way, simply not signing the titles, sometimes arguing that the national law contradicts local laws (Ana María Alarcón, former director, Land Registry Office, Libertador Municipality, personal interview, 19 May 2009). Notably, national state institutions are also often the ones holding up the land tenure process in the aforementioned ways. In Caracas, the *Instituto Nacional de la Vivienda* (INAVI, the former Banco Obrero that was created in 1928 and charged with building housing, such as the *superbloques*, for low-income residents),<sup>24</sup> which owns much of the land that barrios now occupy, is one of the most significant obstacles to the titling process.<sup>25</sup> The inconsistent and complex political dynamics from place to place has required the CTUs to adopt distinct tactics towards different state institutions, a not uncommon problem for urban popular movements (Lowe 1986: 56).

In terms of bureaucratic obstacles, one CTU activist and ex-employee of the Land Registry

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<sup>24</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>25</sup> This was observed from various CTU meetings at the Land Registry Office in Libertador District, though I did not do any interviews with the INAVI office.



Office in the Libertador District explains the difficulty of registering the new barrio plots and issuing land titles. To begin with, 80 per cent of the process is manual and the organization of all the papers this generates is very poor. Additionally, a CTU must register with its local land office, the OTN, and any other office that might have partial ownership over the land. However, often it is unknown who actually owns the land, so the question must be investigated.<sup>26</sup> To compound this problem, communication between institutions is notoriously bad, and because the documents are only on paper, the exchange of files between institutions is also very erratic and slow. Finally, multiple signatures from different state institutions are required in order to issue the titles. In some cases, this bureaucratic process means that some CTUs are waiting for five or more years to receive their land title. When asked why the process is so complicated, Ana responded simply, 'Because it's not made to work' (Pobladores Movement activist, Caracas, personal interview, 27 May 2010; also CTU meeting, Land Registry Office, Caracas, 19 May 2009).

The OTN has not been immune to these problems. Since 2006, the OTN which has changed hands from the Vice President's office to the Ministry of Housing to now the Ministry of Public Works and Housing. It was stripped of its budget and the directorship was given to someone who was widely perceived as a political appointment by a minister that was not interested in land regularization.<sup>27</sup> As a result, the relationship between the institution and

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<sup>26</sup> Record keeping is one of the major reasons land regularization is so poor in Venezuela. It is not uncommon, for example, for a land title to be held by more than one person for the same plot of land (Camacho & Tarhan 1991: 101-2). Fraudulent land sales, a history of land occupation by the wealthy as well as by the poor (Bolívar Barreto et al 2000: 31), and the low prioritization of land registration on the part of the state all contribute to the problem. Under the new urban land laws there is a greater push for land to be registered in order to recuperate lost municipal taxes (Land Registry Director, Caracas Metropolitan Assembly of CTUs, 3 June 2010). However, the process is slow, not least because very few people are working on sorting out the history of land ownership. For example, in the Libertador District one employee at the Land Registry Office is charged with documenting who actually owns each parcel, an effort that requires investigating historical ownership claims and interpreting the various iterations of the legal code over the past 150 years (Zulma Narvaez, OTN Geographer and Marcelo Carrasco, Libertador District Land Registry Investigator, personal interviews, 12 May 2009).

<sup>27</sup> In February 2010, a new appointment, Carolys Pérez, was made by the same minister and seemed

the CTU movement deteriorated. In one instance, a CTU activist from Anzoátegui state describes how after the departure of Martínez, the OTN allied with the local mayor who was antagonistic to the land tenure process and had attempted to supplant the CTU activists who were assisting with the *levantamiento* process in the state. The OTN and the municipality wanted to close a make-shift cadastre office that the activists had started in 2004 and open another office with institutionally-appointed technical experts. After a 10-month struggle against this proposal, the 'popular office' was shut down (personal interview, 29 May 2010). As Ricardo explains, 'There are people in the state who want the popular movements to be subordinate. They don't accept that we are politically autonomous. They don't accept that we can make decisions and be allies. They want cowardly allies that hide behind them' (CTU activist, Caracas, personal interview, 15 April 2010).

The accumulated result of these institutional struggles and bureaucratic hurdles is that very little is actually happening by the way of land regularization and, as of the summer of 2010, the OTN was at a virtual standstill. The problem became so significant that one of the main thrusts of the reform of the Urban Land Regularization Law was a radical reinvention of the institution so that it is made permanently separate from any ministry, given its own budget, and acts on behalf of the CTUs – a return to its original design under Martínez. With the recent passage of the reform bill, the OTN will be re-named the Autonomous Socialist Urban Land Institute, giving an indication of the emphasis the movement is placing on it being an independent institution outside of the bureaucratic structures of state ministries.

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tentatively agreeable to CTU activists. In an interview, Pérez expressed interest in resolving the problems of the office, streamlining the land tenure process, and supporting the larger political agenda of the CTUs (Carolys Pérez, Director of the OTN, personal interview, 20 May 2010).

## **REIVINDICACIÓN AND NEW SPATIAL PRACTICES**

In a small, dark office in Guaicaipuro, a town just southwest of Caracas, about four metro stops from my residence in Antímano, I am sitting with Enrique who is teaching me about the digital mapping system used in the cadastre process. Guaicaipuro is part of Los Altos Mirandinos, a region that over the past few decades has been steadily absorbed by the sprawl of Caracas (see Map 3, p. xii). Enrique is a trained mechanical engineer and a CTU activist. He and five CTU activists comprise a team of people who support the technical aspects of applying for land title in Guaicaipuro. This team, along with dozens of others like it across the country, are part of an effort by the movement to keep the regularization process rooted in the barrios, to develop technical skills within the communities themselves ('popular cadastre'), and to organize the participation of barrio residents in the regularization process.

Enrique is showing me his role in the land registration process: drawing a digital map from the handwritten ones done by the CTUs. In most developed countries the cadastre happens as part of the city planning process before any house is built. In Venezuela, however, apart from a few exceptions, cadastre is lagging far behind actual construction. Some estimates suggest that only about 35 per cent of all developed land in Caracas is mapped and surveyed (Martínez n.d.).<sup>28</sup> As a result, much of the process of land titling involves this arduous, technical process.

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<sup>28</sup> This is a holdover from the colonial and cacique periods. The fight for land was often executed through squatting or taking of land – it was a more or less fluid resource – excluding slaves and the poor who were not allowed to 'own' land. Later, the elite preferred to not survey their land because this limited the ability for it to get taxed and they could continue to make claims on other properties, resulting in multiple claimants. One study on barrio land ownership in the 1990s found that at that time purchasing title took four to twelve years to complete, in part because the search for the true owner is so arduous (Camacho & Tarhan 1991).

Despite these difficulties (or perhaps because of them?) and despite the state institutional obstacles that were discussed above, the outcome of forming a CTU involves more than just land tenure. Here is where Lefebvre's (1991/1974) multi-dimensional concept of space is useful because it allows us to imagine beyond the immediate demands of the CTUs and to examine the multiple socio-spatial impacts that popular organizations can have on urban space.

First, the process of forming a CTU involves the accumulation, visibilization and dissemination of local knowledges (what Lefebvre [1991/1974] might call '*conocer*'). This results in the creation of a new form of popular organization<sup>29</sup> and makes concrete the struggle for *reivindicación* (claiming recognition/making demands) that barrio residents told me again and again is a chief characteristic of not only the CTU process, but of the larger Bolivarian Revolution (see also Antillano 2005, 2006; García-Guadilla 2006). *Reivindicación* is a politics that has long been talked about as one of the first steps in resolving the concerns of the Venezuelan barrios in terms of both rehabilitation and in breaking down the socio-spatial segregation of the city (Bolívar & Baldó 1995). The struggle for such recognition is a political act, for despite their high visibility in the capital, staring down from the mountain sides, the barrios are a geography that has long been ignored by state institutions, except for during the electoral season. This is symbolically represented in the fact that the barrios were not included on any city map before 2002.<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, the significance of claiming recognition as historic, geographically-significant, heterogeneous subjects stems from

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<sup>29</sup> As one of the first organizations of the Bolivarian Revolution of its kind, the CTU model has been replicated by other state-initiated projects, most notably by the Community Councils who also organize around a territory (that often but not always corresponds to the CTU *polígono*), initiate a community assembly, nominate spokespeople, and use a census to assess community needs. These types of organizations have come to be considered an expression of popular power that also corresponds to the decentralization of governance. Several authors, however, have noted the problems that state-initiated organizations encounter in terms of autonomy, decision-making, skills, and resources (Hawkins & Hansen 2006; García-Guadilla 2008; Gómez Calcaño & Martín 2008; Motta 2011a)

<sup>30</sup> See Antillano (2005) for a critique of how the barrios have been symbolically negated from the city.

histories of socio-cultural marginalization, a lack of a sense of urban citizenship, and the systematic delegitimization of barrio rationalities that were physically and politically 'paved over' during the 20<sup>th</sup> century (discussed in Chapter 3; see Virtuoso 2006: 214; Vargas-Arenas 2007: 48-51; Sanoja Obediente & Vargas-Arenas 2008). Thus, the activities of the CTUs have literally put the barrios 'on the map'.

While 'representations of space' (e.g. maps) are changing as a result of the formation of CTUs, the 'spatial practices' of the barrios are also changing. Following Lefebvre (1991/1974), spatial practices refer to the physical organization of barrio space. The new boundaries that are inscribed in physical space by the creation of a *poligonal*, the demarcation of individual plots, and the new numbering system indicate the emergence of new spatial practices within the barrios of Venezuela.

The idea of spatial practices also refers to the way that physical space is moved through and used. Census-taking has initiated a whole spatial practice of *recorridos*, or walk-throughs, of barrio communities, through which CTU activists come to be familiar with barrios outside of their own. 'I came to know La Vega in the process of the land committees, because I went to El Encanto, Las Casitas, Los Torres [barrio names]... a process of accompaniment among ourselves in order to constitute all the land committees' (Maria, CTU activist, Caracas, personal interview, 14 May 2010). This new spatial practice of going from one barrio to another has also created new social relations of collectivity and solidarity – different from the historical isolation between barrios – that has further contributed to the articulation of popular power and the transformation of urban space, which will be discussed further below.

Importantly, as Enrique's work illustrates, the transformation of both representations of

space and spatial practices in the barrios has been accomplished by integrating popular knowledges about the barrios with acquired technical knowledge about the cadastral system. Popular knowledges, or what I will also refer to as 'lived space knowledges', are often knowledges that are not immediately visible to an outsider and thus not easily captured by technocratic logics (e.g. where to mark the boundaries of the CTU territory [Lefebvre 1991/1974: 23, 26, 349; Gottdiener 1993: 131]). Various students of barrio politics view this fusion of knowledges as a powerful tool for innovative urban transformation (see Chombart 1995: 38; Appadurai 2002; de Souza 2006). Marcelo Lopes de Souza (2006: 330) suggests that in this way, urban movements are doing 'critical urban planning' that is changing both the barrios in which popular actors live as well as the power relations that produce the city. He argues,

For social movements it means that the more they use their 'local knowledge' (knowledge of the space of people's needs and 'language') in terms of planning by means of combining it with the technical knowledge produced by the state apparatus and universities (in order both to criticize some aspects of this knowledge and to 'recycle' and use some other ones), the more strategic can be the way they think and act. This kind of knowledge (and of power) should not be underestimated, even if social movements obviously do not (and cannot) 'plan' the city as the state apparatus does it.

CTUs are usually adamant and intentional about ownership of the cadastral process. In the first years of the decree cadastral cooperatives, like that in which Enrique works, were established in many of the *parroquias* in the Metropolitan Area of Caracas with the explicit

purpose of training teams of barrio residents in cadastral techniques who could then train CTU spokespeople to complete the process on their own. Similarly, the census is seen as a tool to enhance the know-how and power of popular organizations. According to Arjun Appadurai (2002) who speaks about a comparable practice of surveying and census-taking in the slums of Mumbai, this kind of information can give rise to 'governmentality from below' and be used as leverage against dominant social relations in a 'politics of knowledge'. Viewed in this light new spatial practices can contribute to the construction of popular power and challenge the techno-bureaucracy of the state which asserts its dominance through the monopoly of certain kinds of (technical) knowledges. Put in other terms, fusing lived space knowledges with technical knowledges has the potential to 'democratize the power of the technocrats' (Licha 1990: 127).

Of course, struggling for and ascribing to such 'representations of space', in Lefebvrian terms, (e.g. maps and censuses) or 'legibility' as James Scott (1998) calls it, also runs the risk of being appropriated by the state (and capital) and subjected to other forms of control. In fact, making oneself 'legible' in the aforementioned ways is even a concern of CTU activists as one explained to me that the Barrio Charter is often not turned into the OTN because the barrios want to protect themselves from their 'enemies' (Pedro, Caracas, personal interview, 18 May 2010). As the state becomes more involved, however, the barrios risk losing the power that comes with control of their own identity and data. Thus notwithstanding his optimism about 'critical urban planning', de Souza (2006: 335) expresses a similar concern when he notes that despite the political nature of urban planning from below, 'in the age of neoliberalism "participation" is becoming more than a useful tool for social integration' and might amount to 'a gradual "adjustment" of the agendas and dynamics of social movements to the agenda and dynamics of the state' (ibid.: 334). In other words, recognition by the state (and

advocates of de Soto might include the market) and the transformation of spatial practices, while accruing some benefits such as land tenure and new skills, by themselves do not necessarily result in the transformation of power relations and the state and could in fact be a tool to exert more control over the barrios.

Following on from the theoretical discussion in Chapter 2 about the production of urban space, at issue in the transformation of space is the question of power. In other words, do the CTU strategies attempt to fundamentally alter the power relations of the city? To answer this question and to address how discrete barrio organizations have articulated at wider scales, a deeper examination of the spatial implication of the CTU organizational process is necessary.

## **TERRITORIAL AGENCY**

The CTUs engage in a process of creating what they refer to as a 'territorial organization'. In order to understand the tensions and opportunities involved in such an organization, it is beneficial to return to the discussion of place/territory begun in Chapter 2. Doreen Massey's (1993, 1994) work cautions against an understanding of place that assumes a single identity, an inward-looking history, and a set of boundaries (Massey 1993: 65). She instead encourages those who are concerned about space-time politics to think in terms of 'a progressive sense of place', that is a sense of place that is 'constructed out of particular interactions and mutual articulations of social relations, social processes, experiences and understandings' which are 'actually constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself' (ibid.: 66).



This concept of place/territory seems difficult to reconcile against the bounded, inward-looking history-making (in the form of the Barrio Charter) of the individual Urban Land Committees. Yet Massey's concern is not that we ignore difference, but 'how to hold on to that notion of spatial difference... without being reactionary' (ibid.: 65). Though Massey is addressing her remarks to theorists, such as David Harvey, they can equally be applied to engagement with popular organizations. Here is where Venezuelan philosopher and popular activist Roland Denis (2008) makes a critical intervention when he explains that a territorial politics is distinct from what one might characterize as 'localism'. It is, rather, a politics that 'exercises territorial control and [stimulates] within itself concrete liberation experiences that no one is capable of pre-establishing or directing from the outside. The territorial agent [is] delimited by its own struggles and not by geography...' Denis's insight suggests that a politics based on territory need not be premised on an exclusionary, isolated sense of place that Massey is concerned about. On the contrary, territory can act as a political tool from which to articulate an alternative, popular power politics based on lived space knowledges that rejects historical dominant social relations.

It is my assertion that the process of organizing individual CTUs which involves the lived experiences of barrio residents, recuperated local histories, and the practice of community assembly forms the basis of territorial popular power that has contributed to the transformation of urban space. For example, by expressing the norms and future desires of each barrio, the Barrio Charter is not just an inward-looking history, but marks the beginning of a politics that goes beyond land titling in which the logics of the collective – acting independent of state control – are made visible and affirmed by and for the community itself. This is what David Slater (2004: 24, emphasis in original) recognizes as a '*counter-geopolitics*, where an alternative indigenous memory of territory is deployed as part of the

ideological struggle against a centralized and mono-cultural state' that, as discussed in Chapter 3, has historically attempted to suppress the histories and logics of the barrios. As CTU activist Pedro explains, 'The Barrio Charter brought us to recognize ourselves, to meet up again... it's the genesis of the revolution' (Caracas, personal interview, 18 May 2010). Others talk about how they now identify more closely with their barrio because of the Barrio Charter, while at the same time have been awakened to aspirations that extend beyond their locality and connect to common visions between barrios. Much of this contributes to the consolidation of a territorial politics that includes but is not limited to land tenure. This is what, in 2004, the CTU movement began to call 'the comprehensive regularization of the barrios', which involves

*urban* regularization [as opposed to just legal regularization], establishing regulations and daily-living norms as part of the recognition of the idiosyncrasies of each community, without failing to take into account their relation to the rest of the city, *pointing to a constituent process and community self-governance*. The fundamental instrument of this process is the Barrio Charter (CTU 2004: 3, emphasis added).

The CTU movement places such significant weight on the Barrio Charter both as a means to articulate common historical struggles and as an instrument to self-govern that one of the principle elements of the Urban Land Regularization Reform Bill consisted of turning the Charter into a legally binding document. How this will be used or what will change in the barrios as a result is still to be seen, but what is clear is that the Charter is considered a strategic tool to transforming the power relations within the barrio and positioning barrio residents to be their own decision-makers under their own logics. This is a significant shift (at

least conceptually, if not yet always in practice) from the clientelistic relations that have dominated barrio politics since the late 1950s towards what Lefebvre (2009: 134) has called *autogestión*, the struggle to not only 'understand but to master [one's] own conditions of existence,' or what is commonly referred to in Venezuela as popular power.

Such a strategy brings to mind Arturo Escobar's (2001: 162) conclusions from research with black communities in the Colombian Pacific where 'the struggle for territory is thus a cultural struggle for autonomy and self-determination.' Drawing on Massey's idea of place and echoing Denis's understanding of a territorial politics, Escobar emphasizes that such a struggle is not a turn to localism but part of a suite of strategies that popular movements utilize to resist the reproduction of global neoliberal capitalism. This understanding of territorial politics as a progressive strategy – and not as a pre-modern, localist tradition – is becoming a more widely recognized aspect of land-based struggles within academic and activist arenas. For example, João Pedro Stedile (2008), organizer with the Brazilian Landless Workers' Movement (MST), reflects on the MST's lessons saying, 'Now we are taking into account that a settlement is more than [land]: it is a territory where we can have autonomy not only to produce, but also to reproduce our culture, our family, and as such, to construct our own values.' Similarly, as territorial organizations the CTUs put into practice direct democracy premised on collective decision-making, cultural and historical identities, and the integration and development of local and technical knowledges. Hence, these highly localized, territorial organizations are also the basis from which the barrios are transforming their mode of articulation and their engagement with the state.

On this last point, the CTUs are engaged in a further strategy, which is the collective construction of popular (territorial) power through regular community assembly. The commitment to constructing popular power through assembly has allowed the CTUs to

articulate as territorial organizations at multiple scales and is a significant factor in the rupturing of historical vertical social relations within the barrios that were a result of clientelistic practices and that undermined the construction of popular power.<sup>31</sup> Constructing new social relations, based on *autogestión*, through community assembly is likely the most important organizational practice of the CTU struggle and various aspects of it will be taken up in this and the next chapter. For this chapter emphasis is placed on the multiple scales of assembly (and thus of organization) that the CTU movement has produced and the impact that has had on the articulation of popular power across urban space.

Many CTU activists remember their local community assembly as the first time they had ever participated in a political organization.<sup>32</sup> CTU activist Francesca from Caracas expresses the novelty of the community assembly and the mutual assistance that was required to organize thousands of local assemblies across the city:

At that time, it was like a bomb when the President said that all the barrios are going to form an assembly! We used to go and help the other barrios, just like others helped me learn. We always would go in a team, those that could go to other barrios and create assemblies and give the same information that others gave to us (personal interview, 20 May 2010).

She goes on to describe how excited people in her barrio were for the first meetings where they eventually named her CTU '*Mi Futuro*' (My Future). They met, and continue to meet,

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<sup>31</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>32</sup> Perhaps not surprisingly, this point often falls along gender lines where most of the female CTU activists that I interviewed and observed had a similar story to Suzana, now a key organizer of one of the Pioneer Camps, who explained, 'Before [the CTU community assembly] I didn't go out, I didn't participate... I left for work... but I wasn't a person who visited the community. That's why I say that the President got me out of the house... Then I completely changed so that now no one is going to shut me in, no one... If it weren't for this [CTU] I would still be here without anyone knowing me' (personal interview, 18 May 2010).

every Monday night. With a small sigh of pleasure, she expresses how much those assembly meetings initially meant to her, 'It was like we were all speaking the same language.' Then she started attending the Caracas-wide meetings. 'They were talking about the same things, about the same problems that we had. They wanted to work to win. That's what we all wanted.' Speaking of the Bolivarian Revolution more generally, Ricardo reflects, 'The greatest achievement is that the people have started to meet each other, according to their interests and their battle cry...' (CTU activist, Caracas, personal interview, 15 April 2010).

While most CTU participants report that the reason for their initial involvement was due to an interest in getting land title, they have continued with the movement because of the experience of working collectively in the local, regional, and national assemblies. 'I think that that's why people love the Urban Land Committees so much... because it's so much of what one wants it to be: working with the people, organizing with the people, having political debates – and not just about the issue of housing but also about habitat which even includes culture (Maria, CTU activist, personal interview, 14 May 2010). Noticeably, state representatives are virtually absent in these assemblies, unless they have been invited by the CTUs. This suggests that the CTUs have created distinctly autonomous spaces for the articulation and collective construction of popular politics.

It has already been mentioned that key actors in the community assembly are the spokespeople who do much of the work of the CTUs. This is a model of organization that has carried into the national CTU movement where spokespeople are selected for different responsibilities at all scales of articulation. The difference between a 'spokesperson' and a 'representative' is subtle and difficult to implement in practice but reflects the rejection of traditional, politically elected representatives who historically did little to improve the

conditions of the barrios. The spokesperson is meant to be a conduit of information both within the community and between the community and state institutions (and later to the larger CTU movement).<sup>33</sup> Marcus, a CTU activist in Bolívar state and a National Liaison for the CTU movement, reflects on the relationship between the assembly and the spokesperson. 'Everything is approved in the assembly... My boss is the assembly' (group interview, 30 May 2010). South African academic and activist Richard Pithouse (2006: 28) suggests that this kind of 'subordination to the authority of the meeting' is essential to a radical democratic practice and 'genuine solidarity'. 'Everything else,' he says, 'is just more exploitation.' One encounters this desire to be subordinate to the meeting, to the collective, again and again in the CTU movement and in Venezuela more generally.

The idea of 'leadership' in this case suggests a departure from the top-down, clientelistic relationship of the past where benefits accrued to individuals who exercised power over a community and limited collective action (Altez 1996: 53-9). From the smallest unit of organization to the largest, the CTUs and other popular organizations in Venezuela are attempting to produce social relationships that approximate those now famously expressed by the Zapatistas in which activists '*mandar obedeciendo*' (lead by obeying). The particular Venezuelan inflection, however, emphasizes the sharing, debate and decision-making that happens in the assembly, a practice that in Bolívar state activists described as extremely difficult to maintain but that ultimately has produced a feeling of family (group interview, 30 May 2010). It is not uncommon to hear CTU activists describe themselves as *assembleistas* and speak passionately about the need to '*construir conjunto*' (construct as a group).

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<sup>33</sup> These are also the people that go on to become the main participants from their barrio in the larger movement. These people often claim the identity of a CTU first and perhaps secondarily the membership of another community organization.

Photo 7: CTU local assembly



The weekly Monday meeting of CTUs from *parroquia* La Vega, *parte baja* (the lower section). Caracas, 2010. Photo by author.

### **CARACAS METROPOLITAN ASSEMBLY OF CTUs AND THE *ASAMBLEA DE BARRIOS***

The previous sections have focused on the organization of the 7,000 individual CTUs across the country. I have argued that, guided by Decree 1666, the very nature of their organization and the local practices that they implement have contributed to a change in spatial practices in the barrios of Venezuela. Central to the practice of the CTUs as local organizations has been the community assembly. This section begins a more explicit discussion about the multiple scales of organization that the CTU movement has constructed. These scales, too, reflect a practice of assembly, which at different scales serves different purposes. While the movement has successfully forged an international identity and international relationships, the focus here and in the next two chapters is on the regional and national scales of the CTU movement. These scales of organization bring to light the uneven geographies of the movement, that is, differences extending from unique histories, disparate locations, distinct configurations of state institutional power, and different classes. Extending on the concept of place raised in Chapter 2 and above, these uneven geographies are not simply neutral

differences but are interwoven with power, what Doreen Massey (1993) has called 'power-geometries': one's socio-spatial positioning in relation to economic flows and political power which ascribes different levels of influence in the world. Noting these uneven geographies within the CTU movement is important to the analysis in this thesis because they affect how the movement constructs popular power (e.g. whose concept of popular power?),<sup>34</sup> and what that in turn means for the transformation of urban space. As such, the uneven geographies of the movement, particularly those seen across the national scale, are raised as a source of tension in this chapter, while in Chapter 5 they are viewed as an opportunity.

Beyond the local community assembly, the most important assembly space for the CTU movement has been the Caracas Metropolitan Assembly of CTUs (from here the Metropolitan Assembly). It is here that CTU activists from across the country have come to seek information and support and to build a common political agenda. The Metropolitan Assembly was the initial base for the national movement and it continues to wield significant weight within the movement. The Metropolitan Assembly meets every Thursday and is open to any CTU member. The meetings can last several hours with an agenda that is usually decided at the beginning of the meeting, a semi-regular rotation of movement facilitators, and open, orderly debate about movement politics and decision-making. Here proposals are put forward, committees are formed, and the work of the movement is reported on and voluntarily taken up by CTU activists. Over the years, the attendance has ranged from hundreds to a mere handful as the intensity of work for the movement has ebbed and flowed. Attendance reflects the state and need of the movement, as well as the demands of the greater political environment.

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<sup>34</sup> Massey (1993: 62, emphasis in original) asks a similar question in terms of globalization: '*whose* condition of postmodernity' are we talking about?



From the beginning, the Metropolitan Assembly was conceived as a place of *encuentro* (meeting) for all CTUs (Marcelo, personal interview, 29 May 2010), and it has also become a 'space for continuous learning' (Ricardo, personal interview, 15 April 2010). This sentiment was recounted to me in various ways:

When I arrived there [at the Metropolitan Assembly] I realized that all that I had learned was very little. I realized that I didn't know anything. For me it's a space for continuous learning... I made myself learn things that I didn't know about... Finally I had found people I could share [my politics] with. That's why I stayed. (Ricardo, CTU activist, Caracas personal interview, 15 April 2010)

One day I went to Caracas to look for the Urban Land Committees... That was in 2002 after the [attempted] coup. I stayed about 15 days watching the [Metropolitan] Assembly, watching how they debated. There I started to systematize a workshop about how the land committees worked. (Marcelo, CTU activist, Anzoátegui State, personal interview, 29 May 2010)

When we [people from the barrio] started going to the meetings we would go to another room with Juan and he would talk to us about the legal issues. They talked about how to do things like the census, what a *poligonal* was... All the knowledge of the CTUs – it was like a class. And we learned how to do the census on our own. (Rosa, CTU activist, Caracas, personal interview, 9 May 2010)

I go to the Metropolitan Assembly because it's a place to learn and debate.

I've always learned there. A person learns something and leaves something behind. (Paula, Pioneer activist, Caracas, personal interview, 28 May 2010)

I got involved in the Metropolitan Assembly in 2004 or 2003... I went there and it seemed amazing to me, listening to the participation of [other CTU activists]... From the Assembly they gave us a job: you have to do *this* with the people. How are you going to do it? With the people. In assembly... That's the school I come from – the school of constructing *with* the people. (Juana, CTU activist, Caracas, personal interview, 26 April 2010)

This practice of learning and debate originates from a recent history of experiences of popular organization in Caracas that have come to inform, at least initially, the formation of the Metropolitan Assembly. The principle experience, out of which many of the founding CTU activists came, was the *Asamblea de Barrios* (Barrio Assembly). The *Asamblea de Barrios* was born out of the *Primer Encuentro Internacional de Rehabilitación de Barrios del Tercer Mundo* (The First International Meeting for Barrio Rehabilitation of the Third World) in 1991 in Caracas (Antillano 2005: 3), an event hosted by the Central University of Venezuela that brought together barrio residents and so-called barrio experts in order to discuss the needs of the barrios, such as water services. Out of this event, the *Asamblea de Barrios* began meeting on a regular basis and brought together residents from more than 200 barrios from the capital (Antillano 2005; see also Grohmann 1996: 51-2; Wilpert 2003). The *Asamblea de Barrios* established an autonomous space apart from the University, and decided that only organizations who actually came from the barrios could participate. The creation of such an assembly signals an historic moment at which point the barrio organizations were starting to overcome their localized isolation and organize on an inter-barrio basis, as well as calling

into question forms of organization that were mediated by state institutions or political parties. Within the wider context of Venezuelan history, it also reflects the larger societal discontent with the government and the political crisis of the time.<sup>35</sup>

Though not a consolidated group, and perhaps not something that one would call a movement, *Asamblea de Barrio* members included some of the key instigators behind Decree 1666 and later the CTU movement.<sup>36</sup> In a personal interview, Pedro, a participant in the *Asamblea de Barrios* and a CTU activist, animatedly describes the experience of *encuentro* in the *Asamblea de Barrios*.

[E]very barrio had its meeting, its neighborhood association... the issue of women, or culture, or sports. Every barrio. But isolated. So when we went to the university [and said], "Hey, what are you doing?" This guy Cristóbal responds, "I'm doing such and such over here." "Hey, we're doing the same thing!"... And the *Asamblea de Barrios* was born, with the principle of exchange between the different barrios of Caracas...

Among communities we were meeting each other; we did things together... We met with the old ladies, we met with the women and with our friends... and with the kids. "We have this singer, this musician, this poet, John Doe who is an activist in such and such activity." So we were exchanging our knowledges and the *Asamblea de Barrios* began to mature... (18 May 2010).

Andrés Antillano (2005: 207), a participant in the *Asamblea de Barrios* and one of the

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<sup>35</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>36</sup> Email correspondence with Gregory Wilpert, 9 September 2009.

founders of the CTU movement, explains how this process of exchange matured into a political agenda. 'The approach to regularize the possession of occupied land by the settlers of popular communities, discussions about the physical rehabilitation of the barrios, the proposal for joint development [between community and the state] of the city's water services, the demand for local self-governance, contributed, among other things, to formulate and shape an itinerary of struggle for the Caracas barrios.' Though the formal meeting ceased to exist by the mid-1990s,<sup>37</sup> its legacy of trying to build popular-based power that is autonomous from the state inspired the creation of the *Mesas Técnicas de Agua* (Water Roundtables), the CTUs, and a variety of other popular organizations.<sup>38</sup>

Importantly, a cohort of barrio residents who had participated in the *Asamblea de Barrios* helped to write Decree 1666, taking with them the lessons of struggle that were learned along the way, as well as an orientation towards the collective construction of popular politics.

The evolution of the *Asamblea de Barrios* becomes complete in the land committees... All that struggle and all that experience in such a short amount of time... what happens is that we have our way of doing it, all the thought, all the life that has come before. Many people don't know the *Asamblea de Barrios*, so when they meet the land committees they say, 'Hey, what a wonder!' No, it's not a wonder. It comes from an already accumulating

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<sup>37</sup> Why the *Asamblea de Barrios* did not continue to meet is disputed. In his research, Wilpert (2003: 111) has suggested that the efforts of the *Asamblea de Barrios* became channelled into Chávez's electoral campaign, while personal interviews have indicated that internal conflicts caused the *Asamblea de Barrios* to stop functioning. What is evident is that the relationships and political ideas sparked by this brief period have survived and have played an important role in mobilizing a variety of contemporary popular organizations.

<sup>38</sup> The most recognized, long-lasting barrio-based organization to emerge from the *Asamblea de Barrios* is the *Mesas Técnicas de Agua* (Water Roundtables), which began in *parroquia* Antímano in Caracas and became a nation-wide form for organizing barrio communities in order to install water and waste systems in the barrios (see Arconada Rodríguez 1996, 2005; Antillano 2005).

process from the 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s, and 90s. It matures at the end of the 90s and beginning of the 2000s. It matures into the land committees (Pedro, CTU activist, Caracas, personal interview, 18 May 2010).

Returning to Henri Lefebvre's (1991/1974: 229) idea about the 'preconditions of social space', an idea that drove forward the historical narrative in Chapter 3, the experience of the *Asamblea de Barrios* acts as a specific and important precondition of social space for the CTU movement which has 'allowed the Urban Land Committees to be established as a popular politics' even before they were officially birthed (Gerardo, Pobladores Movement activist, Caracas, personal interview, 6 May 2010). The *Asamblea de Barrios* is often invoked by CTU activists, even those who are too young to have participated in it, as a reminder of how the barrios began to construct a collective agency through regular assembly meetings, the sharing of local practices across barrios, collective decision-making, and self-determined interaction that did not depend on the mediation of state institutions (Gerardo, Pobladores Movement activist, Caracas personal interview, 6 May 2010; Carlos, CTU activist, Lara State, personal interview, 10 April 2010). This was an example of popular power and *autogestión*. However, it is also important to recognize that this was a Caracas-specific experience and as such has had a greater impact on the social space in Caracas than in other locations.

Based on the experience of the *Asamblea de Barrios* and the relationships that were forged, the first Caracas Metropolitan Assembly of CTUs was organized before the decree was even announced (Cristóbal, CTU activist, Caracas personal interview, 5 June 2010; Pedro, CTU activist, Caracas, personal interview, 18 May 2010). While in the present period, CTUs across the country have regional assemblies (in Bolívar, Mérida, Aragua, Miranda, and Zulia, to name a few) and their own histories of struggle, nonetheless the Caracas Metropolitan

Assembly of CTUs reflects a power-geometry (however unintentional) within the CTU movement. By virtue of the fact that the CTU organizational structure has been based on a Caracas-specific experience and that Caracas is the geographic center of government, allowing greater access to national state institutions, the Caracas Metropolitan Assembly of CTUs possesses an extensive accumulated history of struggle and as such brings to bear significant influence in the national movement. This influence is most visible in the articulation of the Pobladores Movement, which was raised in Chapter 1 and will be discussed below.

### **BEYOND LAND TITLING: OTHER STRATEGIES, BIGGER SCALES, AND NEW IDENTITIES**

While urban land distribution is an important premise for the organization of the CTUs and has the potential to disrupt the extreme capital accumulation in the private real estate market that is occurring in Venezuela (Rodríguez 2009), in itself it is not enough to produce a new kind of city, let alone a new socialist city. Land redistribution for various purposes – agrarian production or urban housing – has been a method of resource allocation by various kinds of governments in Latin America on both sides of the political spectrum for purposes ranging from ‘inclusion’ in the capitalist market to maintaining political power (Ward 2003; Davis 2006: 82-6). Land ownership – though contentious and resisted by elite landholders and even state institutions that are charged with its implementation – if achieved under the same social relations, does not transform urban space (Gogol 2002: 320). An activist from the MST, one of the most widely-recognized land-related movements in the world, reflected,

I entered the MST out of necessity [for land], [but] the movement taught us to have a larger vision, to have a vision that it is not enough to struggle for

yourself, for a piece of land for yourself. The movement gives you conditions to understand the whole of society, the way in which it is structured, and who it is that orders in the country today... The struggle is for land, it is for credit, it is for the change of society as a whole... (quoted in Karriem 2009: 319)

The CTU movement is, in a way, like this man; it has evolved through several stages since 2002 as the national context changes and as the movement learns from its experiences.<sup>39</sup> During the first two years, it was largely focused on the land regularization process. This mostly emphasized land titling. However, it quickly became clear that land title was not enough to address broader concerns about infrastructure, service needs, and the right to the city (Cristóbal, CTU activist, Caracas, personal interview, 9 May 2009). As early as 2004 the movement published a document, called '*Democratización de la Ciudad y Transformación Urbana*' (Democratization of the City and Urban Transformation, CTU 2004). The document was written in response to the Housing Mission<sup>40</sup> that the government created. It lays out the movement's interest in deepening the process of regularization to include 'democratization of land', 'comprehensive transformation of the barrios', and the 'creation of new settlements'. This marked the next phase in the movement's development in which 'comprehensive transformation' was the focal point. 'The meaning of transformation should be comprehensive, not centered only on construction, but also incorporating productive

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<sup>39</sup> See Chapter 5.

<sup>40</sup> The *Misiones*, or Missions, are probably the most widely recognized and praised policy innovations of the Chávez government. In an attempt to sidestep the bureaucratic institutions of the state and provide direct services to the barrios, the government created – and continues to do so – several Missions, each with its own specific social program. For example Missions Robinson, Ribas and Sucre provide literacy and primary education, secondary education, and university-level education, respectively. The most famous Mission, *Barrio Adentro* (Inside the Barrio), provides free universal medical services, which I myself have used on several occasions. The Missions are located in each barrio or group of barrios. The Housing Mission is the same one that has been recently re-packaged and re-launched as the 'Great Housing Mission', mentioned in Chapter 1.

transformation, access to the goods and services that up to now are far from the barrios, promoting sustainable development of popular communities and their political participation' (CTU 2004: 5).

2006 to the present period has been characterized by a stronger push to 'democratize the city' – 'confronting the dynamics of segregation and exclusion and counteracting the territorial, urban, economic, and social disequilibrium. This assumes that it is not just about "reconciling" the barrio with the "formal" city, but it is about transforming the city, inverting the dynamics that have created a "city for the rich" and another "city of the poor"' (CTU 2004: 5). Along with the articulation with other urban movements under the framework of the Pobladores Movement, the CTUs are also speaking more and more about the 'right to the city', in the Lefebvrian understanding of the term (Lefebvre 1996/1968), which will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 6. I am not suggesting that these have been clearly demarcated periods of time. Rather, periodization of the movement shows an evolving agenda in which previous goals are expanded to include a broader understanding of the urban and of the struggle that the movement must employ in order to transform urban space. Prioritization of themes ebb and flow as the national context changes or new urgencies are encountered (Cristóbal, CTU activist, Caracas, personal interview, 9 May 2009).

In accordance with this shifting agenda, by 2004 new scales of organization were being articulated, and the CTU movement began to look less like local barrio organizations and more like a national organization, with its main strength coming from Caracas and the Metropolitan Assembly. When asked why the Metropolitan Assembly began to promote a national scale of articulation, one CTU activist responded that the politics demanded it: 'the politics of regularization was national, not just for Caracas. So with this national politics the



land committees had to construct a national level... [that's when] we were thinking even further out. We were visualizing ourselves as an organization – more than an organization that creates in the territory – how to link up [*enlazamos*] nationally' (Maria, CTU activist, Caracas, personal interview, 14 May 2010).

This is when the *Enlaces Nacionales* (National Liaisons) was created. This national assembly, which tries to meet monthly, has further created several committees, such as, the Training Team, International Relations Committee, Communications Committee, and the Reform Bill Committee. Each of these groups meets independent of state mediation, and each of its participants is meant to act as a conduit of information from their local CTU to the regional or national space and vice versa (see Figure 1, p. 190). While the committees and the Liaisons meetings are open to anyone, they most often meet in Caracas making it difficult for all to participate equally. Partly as a consequence of this difficulty, and in response to the internal crisis that the movement was facing,<sup>41</sup> since 2010 there have been greater attempts to hold meetings outside of Caracas and the committee structure is being re-examined.

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<sup>41</sup> See Chapter 1.

The diagram illustrates the structure of the National Liaisons. At the center is a box labeled "National Liaisons". Surrounding it are several other boxes and ovals. At the top, there are five ovals labeled "CTU". Below these are two boxes labeled "Metropolitan Assembly" and "Regional Assembly". At the bottom, there are three boxes labeled "Committee", "Training Team", and "Committee". Arrows indicate the flow of information or resources. Arrows point from the "CTU" ovals to the "National Liaisons" box. Arrows also point from the "CTU" ovals to the "Metropolitan Assembly" and "Regional Assembly" boxes. Arrows point from the "National Liaisons" box to the "Committee", "Training Team", and "Committee" boxes. Arrows also point from the "Metropolitan Assembly" and "Regional Assembly" boxes to the "National Liaisons" box.

For the simple reason that there are grassroots spaces... a district assembly... that articulates with the Metropolitan Assembly, and that those people from the Metropolitan Assembly participate in a national space for coordination, such as the National Liaisons Meeting – for all that one can qualitatively observe from that, all the fissures, all the problems, the contradictions and differences – it's one of the few expressions that we can see of an

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autonomous popular organization [in Venezuela]. (Gerardo, Pobladores Movement activist, Caracas, personal interview, 6 May 2010)

With the creation of local, regional and national organizations and the development of political agendas at these multiple scales, the CTU movement is working and reworking new geographies for popular movements – new spatial practices, new representations of space, new scales of articulation – that had not previously existed in Venezuela.<sup>43</sup>

In addition, the work of Caracas CTU activists has also inspired other housing and land efforts such as the [Caracas] Metropolitan Network of Renters, the Pioneer Movement, and the Custodian Movement.<sup>44</sup> The Network of Renters is concerned with rental costs (mostly in apartment buildings) and organizes to prevent evictions. Additionally, it has a more middle class base (Celia, Network of Renters activist, Caracas, personal conversation, 1 June 2009). The Pioneers are barrio residents who rent or live in overcrowded conditions with their families. They are organizing to create new settlements in which they would be the planners, developers and workers of new communities.<sup>45</sup> The Custodians are those that take care of apartment buildings. They are organizing for both housing and labor rights. Together these groups, along with a couple of brand-new organizations, call themselves the Pobladores Movement, what Pioneer activist Juan Carlos has called ‘the unity of those who are excluded in the city and against capitalism’ (National *Encuentro*, 10 April 2010). Thus Caracas-based CTUs are constructing a new geography of articulation with other urban movements, one that bridges class and location in the city and that also seeks to more substantially transform urban power relations. In this way, the Pobladores Movement reflects a more comprehensive

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<sup>43</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>44</sup> The movements often give credit to specific CTU members for helping to organize them, or the movements have members that also participate in their local CTU.

<sup>45</sup> See Chapter 6 for more on the *Nuevas Comunidades Socialistas* (New Socialist Communities).

vision for the 'right to the city'.

This work demonstrates, on one hand, that the Caracas CTUs have been able respond to a diversity of housing needs in the city, thereby bringing together a larger coalition and expanding their fight into a discourse of justice and equality for all, regardless of their housing situation. On the other hand, it also reveals the uneven geographies within the movement as Caracas-based CTU activists have been pushing for the national CTU movement to take on this larger campaign, yet as of the end of 2010 few other places had.<sup>46</sup>

However, the power-geometry of the Caracas CTUs – the weight that they have in the movement due to access to resources,<sup>47</sup> the number of CTU activists who participate in the movement and who form part of the national committees, and a history of political organizational experience – led to the implicit adoption of the Pobladores Movement identity, a move that produced significant tensions in the movement and that came to a head in 2010.<sup>48</sup> Though they might have agreed with the general vision of a unified urban voice, many (but not all) CTU activists from other places saw the prospect of a Pobladores Movement as distracting from other urgent issues that the CTU movement had yet to resolve, particularly the failure to pass the Urban Land Regularization Reform Bill<sup>49</sup> and the almost complete halt of land titling across the country (various interviews and conversations; Debate, National *Encuentro*, 9-10 April 2010). Frustrations around the differences of opinion

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<sup>46</sup> The states of Lara and Miranda do have renters' rights organizations who by 2009 had begun to build alliances with CTUs in those places. Again, the question of the Pobladores Movement and the more inclusive right to the city politics might now be duly accepted across the country as a result of President Chávez's push to re-initiate the housing agenda in the country. See Chapter 1 for further discussion.

<sup>47</sup> Usually through relationships with state institutions. See Chapter 6.

<sup>48</sup> This is not the only power-geometry in the movement. The CTU/Pobladores movement is intersected by other power relations based on locations *within* Caracas, gender (an issue that the movement is taking up more and more), and level of formal education. Any of these would be a worthwhile study in themselves but are not investigated here.

<sup>49</sup> It should be noted, however, that the bill did include elements that were specifically tied to the interests of other urban popular organizations, most notably the Pioneers.

on this issue were palpable at the National *Encuentro* and at other national meetings in 2010, some suggesting the Pobladores Movement was an anomaly and not critical to the national CTU efforts, others holding it up as an aspiration for the rest of the country.

As the issue erupted at a National Liaisons Meeting in May 2010, one CTU activist from Caracas tried to acknowledge the local differences within the movement while at the same time encouraging the movement to take a step forward in adopting a unified position with other popular organizations.

In spite of the time and the contradictions and the tensions, we have maintained a standard of construction of popular organization. But it is important to discuss how we can achieve higher levels of organizational and operational efficiencies. [We need to] also address contradictions that come from organizational differences, or from different realities. I understand the issue of the Pobladores Movement in this way... It's a reality of Caracas – we need to recognize the differences in other states. We also need to construct a popular movement, popular power – it's incredibly important because other factors are trying to divide us. (Cristóbal, CTU activist, Caracas, National Liaisons Meeting, 22 May 2010)

A few days later, while reflecting on the discussion that had been bubbling up in the preceding weeks and months, Pobladores Movement activist Ana addressed the more pessimistic analysis of the variances within the movement, saying,

I see that this conflict exists: of a vanguard that constructs very coherent, very revolutionary politics, very much in the spirit of a new logic of the city,

but in the end there are people – who are the majority – who continue internally organizing themselves around the issue of property. In that sense, I see the movement as very weak (Caracas, personal interview, 27 May 2010).

Ana's words, along with the push by Caracas-based CTUs to organize a Pobladores Movement, reveal the unevenness of the movement which is shaped by distinct historical geographies. Even within Caracas, uneven geographies between barrios lead to distinct forms and levels of participation in the Metropolitan Assembly and the larger CTU movement. The same is true across the country. One of the most significant strategies of the movement is the work related to suturing together these uneven geographies so as to construct a national movement that is continuously evolving a collective popular politics. This is a process that I am calling the production of 'collective lived space', which for the CTUs is largely accomplished through the use of a popular education methodology that is employed during the movement's regular *encuentros*. This is the focus of discussion in the next chapter.

## **CONCLUSION**

The chapter has examined how the organization and practices of the Urban Land Committees, through the process of regularization, are changing the historical land ownership structure in Venezuela. By taking charge of the land tenure process and integrating lived space knowledges with technical knowledges the CTUs are changing the spatial practices – the physical organization and use – of the barrios. The chapter has demonstrated that the very nature of CTU organizations, with its basis in the practice of

community assembly and the Barrio Charter, has been used to construct a new form of popular power that is practicing local self-governance, recuperating barrio histories and identities, and protecting diverse modes of living. This, I argue, amounts to a territorial politics of *autogestión* that, in the words of Roland Denis (2008) 'exercises territorial control and [stimulates] within itself concrete liberation experiences.'

Using identification with a territory as a progressive political tool, then, the CTU movement has been able to successfully articulate at multiple scales, including the regional, national and international (though not discussed here), thus constructing new scales of political activity that were uncommon for barrio inhabitants in the years prior to the Chávez presidency. The early initiation of the Caracas Metropolitan Assembly of CTUs, which was organized by those with roots in the *Asamblea de Barrios*, combined with the absence of the OTN in the first years of the titling process laid the groundwork and opened the window for an autonomous organization that has rejected state-led mediation. Out of the perceived need to engage in the transformation of urban space at a national scale, the national CTU movement was constructed with an eye towards moving beyond the remit of Decree 1666. As early as 2004 the national CTU movement expanded the debate about urban land ownership to include comprehensive barrio improvements and embarked on a mission to 'democratize the city'. In recent years, the Caracas-based CTUs are also struggling for the 'right to the city' through the articulation of the Pobladores Movement.

However, other geographies are also at play in the CTU efforts to transform urban space. The chapter has delved into the issues of uneven geographies, both in terms of the power-geometries involved in the relationship between CTUs from across the country, and in terms of the differences between state institutions and municipalities that have created distinct

political urgencies for each locality. These uneven geographies have shaped the construction of the CTU movement, producing characteristics that have been both fruitful and conflictual. While this chapter focused on the tensions that uneven geographies have created within the movement, the next chapter will discuss how 'geographies of difference' also form the basis from which the movement is can produce revolutionary 'collective lived space'.

Finally, though only briefly touched on here, through the discussion of the OTN I have begun to unpack the relationship that the CTU movement has with the state and the opportunities and limitations that state institutions provide. This theme will be the central focus in Chapter 6.



## Chapter 5

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### CONSTRUCTING POPULAR POWER AND COLLECTIVE LIVED SPACE

*'[The popular education methodology] is a political instrument... because you participate and you are the generator of a politics... It's from the common people. I mean, you put your knowledge here and from your knowledge we are going to see how to improve all of our knowledges... It's a socialist methodology... First, you plan from the people, with the people, for the people... And using another method someone else plans for you. They are planning your life. They are planning your development in the world. They are completely dominating you...'*

Marcelo, Urban Land Committee Activist, Anzoátegui State,  
personal interview, 29 May 2010

The last chapter highlighted the strategies of the local CTUs that involve the *reivindicación* (claiming recognition) of the diverse knowledges, histories, and identities of the Venezuelan barrios, as well as, the formation of self-organized, democratic popular organizations. These strategies have contributed to the creation of new spatial practices (e.g. physical organization and daily routines) in the barrios. The CTUs have been able to do this, in part, because their practices are based on the lived experiences and logics of barrio inhabitants – the assertion of lived space knowledges into the arena of Venezuelan urban politics and organization. This chapter carries that theme forward, suggesting that the CTU movement not only bases its early organizational processes on lived space, but that it actively produces new, collective lived space in an ongoing way. Moreover, the starting point for this collective lived space is the uneven geographies of the movement. Though at times the movement has struggled to preserve its national unity and force, the strength of the national movement is premised on 'geographies of difference'. Such a mode of organization is somewhat unique in Venezuela and signals the construction of new urban social relations in the country. The

production of collective lived space, a term that will be defined through the discussion of this chapter, has over time expanded the movement's understanding of urban power relations and the manner in which those power relations must be reworked across urban space – not just in the barrio – in order to transform the city.

The continuous production of collective lived space has been facilitated by the use of a particular popular education methodology that the movement adopted in 2004. The popular education methodology (from here on called The Methodology, in accordance with the CTU terminology) has been used as the framework for every CTU National *Encuentro*, as well as hundreds of smaller *encuentros*, over the past seven years. In addition, the principles of The Methodology have permeated many of the movement's daily organizational spaces. By helping to produce collective lived space, The Methodology has directly contributed to the articulation of the movement at a national scale and to the evolution of the movement to go beyond land titling and toward the right to the city.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss how the CTU movement is consciously producing collective lived space and how this is contributing to the transformation of urban space in the Bolivarian Revolution. The popular education methodology, while clearly important in the life of the movement, also provides for this chapter a pivot point from which to bring the discussion of urban transformation into the realm of concrete practices and popular power construction. Hence, the first section will describe The Methodology in detail, discussing its origins and the principles upon which it is based. The second section will explain where and when The Methodology is used and will touch on some of the more obvious outcomes of the process. The third section is interested in developing the argument that this methodological process constitutes the collective construction of lived knowledges and,

thus, of collective lived space, a powerful tool for popular power in the struggle to transform the city. The discussion unfolds by taking up the issues of difference and collectivity, which serve as the foundational elements of the CTUs' production of collective lived space. The importance of these two elements for the transformation of urban space will be clarified through a re-engagement with Lefebvre and popular education theory.

Finally, despite the benefits that The Methodology has brought to the CTU movement, the movement continues to face difficulties when trying to overcome historically fragmented social relations, uneven power relations, and its own internal contradictions, issues that were discussed in the last chapter as 'uneven geographies'. Thus, the second-to-last section will discuss the movement's need to continually produce and re-produce collective lived space in order to overcome these uneven geographies. The final section will look at one specific experience of *encuentro*, the First Pobladores Movement School for Activists that was held in the summer of 2009. The experience of the school highlights many of the concrete daily struggles that the movement faces and raises various questions about the extent to which collective lived space can be produced by barrio dwellers and the limitations of transforming urban power relations. This last section introduces the idea of *cogestión*, another strategy of the CTU movement that will be taken up further in Chapter 6.

## **THE POPULAR EDUCATION METHODOLOGY OF THE CTU MOVEMENT**

Key to the CTU movement's articulation at a national scale and the evolution of the movement's political agenda to transform urban space is the popular education methodology that it uses. The Methodology is one of the defining practices of the CTU movement, something for which the movement is recognized by outside observers. It has

been used during or in preparation for every major national meeting of the CTU movement since 2004. Dozens of CTU activists have been trained as facilitators of The Methodology who, in many cases, have gone on to utilize The Methodology in other popular organizations, such as the Community Councils, the Venezuelan Chapter of the Council of Social Movements (CMS) of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America-Treaty of Commerce (ALBA-TCP), and the Latin American Secretariat for Popular Housing (SELVIP). Additionally, the principles of The Methodology permeate the movement's other spaces of articulation, such as the assemblies mentioned in Chapter Four.<sup>1</sup> For these reasons, The Methodology is an important aspect in the movement's capacity and orientation to the transformation of urban space.

The origins of The Methodology can be traced to a group of rural community activists in Chile during the Presidency of Salvador Allende, where they developed The Methodology in order to collectively negotiate policies with the state. After the assassination of Allende, many of the activists lived in exile but continued to develop their popular education methodology in Cuba, then in China, and finally in Venezuela, where they began to work with indigenous communities in the southern part of the country (Methodology Workshop, 24 April 2010). Those who worked with The Methodology in Venezuela came to be known as the 'Churuatas,' the name for the distinctive indigenous communal housing of that region. The contemporary form of The Methodology, which has evolved over several decades, also draws on the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire and Venezuelan educator Simón Rodríguez (Marcelo, CTU activists, Anzoátegui State, personal interview, 29 May 2010).

Several CTU activists had previously worked with the Churuatas, so in 2004, with the

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<sup>1</sup> Though the extent to which this is the case at the scale of the local CTUs varies considerably between regions.

insistence of these activists, the *Oficina Técnica Nacional para la Regularización de la Tenencia de la Tierra Urbana* (OTN, National Technical Office for the Regularization of Urban Land Tenancy) invited the Churutas to teach The Methodology to a couple of dozen CTU members from across the country (Marcelo, CTU activists, Anzoátegui State, personal interview, 29 May 2010; Cristóbal, CTU activist, Caracas, personal interview, 5 June 2010). This group became known as the *Equipo de Formación* (Training Team), which during its first two years of existence was a paid team of CTU activists that organized local *encuentros* and facilitated The Methodology for CTUs across the country.<sup>2</sup> As one CTU activist describes the team, 'We are facilitators and orientators, not teachers or intellectuals. We facilitate and orientate the debate' (Ricardo, Caracas, personal interview, 15 April 2010).

While similar to popular education work across Latin America (see Kane 2001) it is notable that the Churutas specifically designed The Methodology for use by people engaged in community work, rather than for educators in schools. This has several implications. First, activists and not outside 'experts' learn and facilitate The Methodology. This involves periodic trainings and refinement of facilitation skills.<sup>3</sup> The CTU movement over the years has also trained new facilitators within their own ranks.<sup>4</sup> This, in a way, both democratizes the popular education process and attempts to renew the informal leadership and coordination of the movement, a common oversight of Venezuelan popular organizations that has often led to their failure (Fadda 1987: 368; Juana, CTU activist, Caracas, personal interview 26 April 2010).

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<sup>2</sup> Due to a change in directorship, noted in Chapter 4, and the subsequent reduction of funds for the OTN, the team is now entirely voluntary.

<sup>3</sup> I was a participant in several of these training workshops offered by Churuata facilitators in Caracas in 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Since 2009, a group of university graduates have become involved in the Pobladores Movement and have taken on key roles in the facilitation of The Methodology. This same group of young activists has also played an important role in the work of organizing the CMS in which the CTUs and the Pobladores Movement have taken a leading role (Martínez, forthcoming).

Second, The Methodology's purpose is to transform lived practices. As a Churuata facilitator succinctly notes, 'There are two methods [to The Methodology]: practice and analysis of practice to transform it' (Methodology Workshop, 24 April 2010). Similarly, Brazilian popular educator Paulo Freire (1972) argued that in order to overcome oppression, one must develop critical consciousness, a process that he referred to as 'conscientization.' 'To surmount the situation of oppression, men must first critically recognize its causes, so that *through transforming action they can create a new situation* – one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity' (ibid.: 24, emphasis added).

If analysis of practice is the focus of The Methodology then the content utilized in the process is actually highly varied depending on what practice is being analyzed. The *process*, then, is what is essential and generalizable and is worth sketching out here.

The Methodology involves five steps:

- 1) the accumulation of information: the telling of each person's story or experience that is elicited through a guiding question (*la echada de cuentos*)
- 2) coding the information into themes (*codificación*)
- 3) analysis: debating the content of each theme (*debate*)
- 4) synthesizing the debate into an agreed upon assessment of practices and proposals for moving forward (*síntesis*)
- 5) evaluation

Key to this process is an 'open registry' of everything that is said. That is, one person or a team of people writes what is said on butcher paper which is then posted on walls. This serves as the material from which to debate and write a collective synthesis of the discussion. The process may take several hours or several days.<sup>5</sup>

**Photo 8: Step One of The Methodology - Sharing of Stories**



2010 CTU Movement National *Encuentro*. Note the 'open registry' posted on the walls to the left. In this instance, the stories were the collectively-produced local stories that each spokesperson around the circle brought from their local *encuentro*. See below for a description of this process. Photo by author.

To illustrate the process,<sup>6</sup> during the 10-day First Pobladores Movement School for Activists the guiding questions, or what Freire (1972) calls 'generative questions', were: 'What are we doing [as CTU activists in our community]? Why are we doing it? With whom are we doing

<sup>5</sup> In the case of the school, this process lasted for 9 consecutive mornings. In other cases, The Methodology process usually takes 1 to 4 days.

<sup>6</sup> See also Motta (2011b) for details of The Methodology process.

it? How are we doing it?' The school was divided up into 15-17-person groups, where each person shared their response to these questions. Over the course of four mornings, for a total of almost 20 hours, local stories of CTU experiences were shared and written. By the end of the morning on the fourth day, people's stories covered the walls of the small rooms that the school occupied. Then the stories were codified into four themes: ideas that suggested more research was necessary in order to understand the problem; ideas that implied organizational articulation was necessary; ideas for organizational planning; and other (see Photo 9, p. 205). Within the small groups each theme, informed by the lived experiences of CTUs from across the country, were then debated in turn.

The debates produced a variety of discussions that commonly recur for the CTU movement. They included the ongoing struggle to build and preserve dignified housing; the expanded understanding of habitat to go beyond housing and include living environment; analysis of relationships with different state institutions; how and why the state was different in distinct regions; how successes were achieved and what could be tried in other localities; why there were difficulties articulating with other barrio-based organizations (particularly the Community Councils); what kind of city people wanted to create; how the culture of capitalism made creating socialism difficult; and ideas about future plans for the movement and the Bolivarian Revolution more broadly. This debate was also captured on paper.

Finally, each group put together a 'synthesis': all the statements of analysis and ideas for future action that all the participants agreed upon. Those statements that could not be agreed upon were marked for continued debate and left out of the 'synthesis.' The synthesis was eventually typed up and sent around to CTU activists, as is also done after every National *Encuentro*. At the end of the 10 days, the whole process was evaluated (The First



Photo 9: Step Two of The Methodology - Codification



The First Pobladores Movement School for Activists, 2009. On the left are instructions for the methodological process. To the right and extending around the room are the stories that each participant shared. Activists from the states of Lara, Anzoátegui, Mérida, Zulia, and Caracas are in the process of codifying the stories. Photo by author.

The Methodology's analysis of practice is also guided by a number of principles:

- ❖ the three 'inters': *interdependencia*, *interconexión*, and *intercambio* (interdependence, interconnection, exchange)
- ❖ the three 'mutuos': *apoyo mutuo*, *conocimiento mutuo*, *respeto mutuo* (mutual

<sup>7</sup> See below for more details about the school.

support, mutual knowledge, mutual respect)

- ❖ the three 'autos': *autogestión*, *autonomía*, *autosustentación* (self-management, autonomy, self-sustainability) (Methodology Workshop, 24 April 2010)

These principles are also reflected in other meeting spaces of the movement, such as the Caracas Metropolitan Assembly of CTUs. Most evident in the debates that are fostered in the other spaces of articulation are the principles of exchange, mutual respect, mutual support, and autonomy. These assemblies are organizational spaces where information is exchanged and issues that commonly affect the CTUs in attendance are debated. Both the Metropolitan Assembly and the National Liaisons Meeting are guided by the 'right to speak' (*derecho a la palabra*), which permits everyone to speak for as long as they need to, in the order that they raise their hand, regardless of who they are or what formal credentials they have. Each item on the agenda is debated in this way until some kind of consensus is reached or a proposal for moving forward is developed. The debates can be loud and heated, and they often endure for many hours, especially when the issue is polarizing or hundreds of people are in attendance.<sup>8</sup>

This strategy for popular organization and the development of popular politics is not new to Latin America (Kane 2001). Popular education of the kind that the CTUs use was disseminated as a political practice by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1972) and is a widespread practice of much popular movement activity throughout the region, the most famous of which is the Landless Worker's Movement (MST) in Brazil (Kane 2001). The use of such a practice involves the critique of traditional, expert-oriented epistemologies, an

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<sup>8</sup> Over the past several years, some topics for debate have been recurring agenda items, such as the Reform of the Urban Land Tenancy Law, the Pobladores Movement identity, and the significant decrease in the distribution of land titles across the country.

examination of the relationship between knowledge and power, and the use of knowledge production to create alternative spaces that challenge dominant power relations (Torres 1990: 22; hooks 1994).

### ***ENCUENTRO Y RE-ENCUENTRO***

Once again we must return to the question, how does the use of The Methodology contribute to the transformation of urban space? First, the methodological process and the principles that underpin it are central to the CTU movement's efforts to collectively construct popular power at various scales of articulation. Most importantly, the movement regularly organizes National *Encuentros* (2004, 2006, 2008, 2010)<sup>9</sup> where The Methodology is used as the process by which a national political agenda is set.<sup>10</sup> The National *Encuentros* usually last 3-4 days, and attendees have first participated in a local *encuentro*,<sup>11</sup> where they will go through the same popular education process. Since its adoption by the CTU movement, The Methodology has been used in hundreds of local CTU *encuentros* in preparation for the larger national events. Spokespeople<sup>12</sup> are selected to bring the 'synthesis' of their local *encuentro* to the national one, where anywhere from 500 (2006) to 108 (2010) spokespeople have been in attendance (Antillano 2009). Consequently, the synthesis that comes out of the National *Encuentro* should reflect an accumulated discussion of the various scales of the movement from the local to the national (see also Motta 2011b). In most cases, the syntheses from national *encuentros* serve as the movement's national political agenda until

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<sup>9</sup> I was in attendance at the *encuentro* in 2010, held near Barquisimeto in the state of Lara.

<sup>10</sup> Other popular organizations use The Methodology in a similar way, though none are as large as the CTU movement.

<sup>11</sup> 'Local' is a word, in this instance, used by the CTU movement to describe any *encuentro* smaller than the national *encuentro*, which could mean anything ranging from an individual CTU or the meeting of all CTUs in a state.

<sup>12</sup> See Chapter 4 for more on the difference between spokesperson and representative.

the next National *Encuentro* is convened.<sup>13</sup>

Marcelo, a member of the original Training Team, describes the work that went into preparing for the National *Encuentro* in Los Teques, Miranda State in 2006,

It was a great experience but a lot of work... For each [local] *encuentro* we had to give two workshops: a preparatory one to prepare the people so that they could do their own *encuentro* in a self-managed way, and later the actual [local] *encuentro*... And when we arrived there [in Los Teques for the National *Encuentro*], the people recognized the work we had done, and they got motivated to get there... There was institutional support, yes, but it wasn't abundant. Cars came from city halls; they arrived carrying people, but community buses also came with people mounted on the back of them headed to the National *Encuentro* [laughs]' (Marcelo, CTU activist, Anzoátegui State, personal interview, 29 May 2010).

Out of these National *Encuentros* have come several concrete proposals. One was to create the National Liaisons as a monthly meeting point for all CTUs through which political projects at the national scale could be coordinated. The reform bill for the Urban Land Regularization Law came out of the 2006 National *Encuentro* in Los Teques where proposals for changing the OTN and streamlining the land titling process were deemed necessary. The beginnings of the Pobladores Movement were also proposed at the same *encuentro*, though it had no name at the time (*Síntesis, II Encuentro Nacional de Comités de Tierra*

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<sup>13</sup> For example, this was not the case for the 2010 National *Encuentro*, where spokespeople from only 8 states were able to participate. Though to my knowledge the synthesis was not formally rejected, doubts lingered about its legitimacy as a sum of national interests and collective commitment (National Liaisons Meeting, Caracas, 22 May 2010).

*Urbana, Los Teques, Miranda State, 3-5 Noviembre 2006*). Other proposals that have been realized include the Land Bank to identify empty and underutilized land and to protect that land for popular use, several marches to demand passage of the reform bill and protest against institutional negligence and corruption, and the creation of different committees to work internally and with state institutions (*Síntesis, III Encuentro Nacional del Movimiento de Pobladores, Maracaibo, Zulia State, 2008*).

**Photo 10: March for the Reform Bill**



One of the agreements at the 2010 National *Encuentro* was to stage a march in support of the Urban Land Regularization Reform Bill. The march took place in Caracas on 8 May 2010. Photo by author.

Many of the most important outcomes of the National *Encuentros*, however, are less tangible. On the one hand, the simple act of meeting and hearing other people's experiences is a unifying and motivating activity for CTU activists. As Francesca says, 'I like to go to the [national] *encuentros* because you learn a lot from the experiences of people. They share what they are doing, the projects, the issuing of the land titles. I love hearing about it and it makes me happy to hear that others are getting titles' (Francesca, CTU activist, Caracas, personal interview, 20 May 2010). Similarly, other national meetings have spurred

local CTUs to become more active, to organize new projects, to re-examine their relationship with state institutions, or to develop a deeper understanding of how to construct popular politics (Ricardo, CTU activist, Caracas, personal interview, 15 April 2010; Evaluation, First Pobladores Movement School for Activists, Lara State, 8 August 2009; group interview, Bolívar State, 30 May 2010). The significance of bringing together the disparate CTUs in terms of the impact on urban space will be discussed more below.

Other intangible outcomes require a view of how the movement is developing over time in relation to the national context in which it organizes. That is, the *encuentros* result in a period of self-reflection for the movement and the debate itself is a meaningful experience that affects how individual CTUs understand their political environment and take action in their local territory. The analysis of local practices that The Methodology facilitates allows participants to put their experiences into a larger context, revealing difficulties, successes, systems, or opportunities that might have been previously hidden. From a popular education perspective, this active engagement with lived experience is potentially a more powerful form of knowledge and learning than that which is simply told to you (a form of learning that Freire (1972) called 'banking'). Participants in the process often experience an 'ah-ha moment' that affirms physicist Thomas Campbell's (2003: 130) belief that 'you must discover truth and knowledge for yourself or it will not be your truth or your knowledge.' In this sense, transformation is a continuous process and cannot be done *for* people; it must be done by them and with them (Freire 1970: 32, 42, 98; Marcelo, CTU activist, Anzoátegui State, personal interview, 29 May 2010).

In addition, the *encuentros*, supported by The Methodology, are concerned with seeking truth where '[t]ruths are events that no longer allow us, in good faith, to see as we previously

saw and to be as we previously were' (Pithouse 2006: 27). Hence, from this meeting and truth discovery, practice is transformed. While there is clear evidence that transformation of practice at a local scale occurs (various personal interviews with CTU activists), at the scale of the national CTU movement this transformation of practice is also evident in the phases that the movement has undergone, as discussed in Chapter 4. Each 'moment' of *encuentro* has shifted the political agenda of the national movement to where it is now: with an ever-growing focus on and deeper development of the 'right to the city.'<sup>14</sup>

Aside from ongoing analysis of how to transform the city, which is exemplified by the shift from exclusive focus on the barrios to concerns about the power relations across the city (that is, the right to the city), two other issues stand out as evolving debates that have grown with intensity in each *encuentro*. The first is the relationship with other popular organizations, which includes those that make up the Pobladores Movement, but also includes other barrio organizations, especially the Community Councils. Analysis of this organization and the CTUs' relationship to it has been difficult, requiring CTU activists to confront not just the fragmentation in their communities but also their own failure to support the political development of what are becoming the most important (and most contentious) popular organizations in the country.

The issues surrounding the Community Councils are reflective of more profound questions about the role of the state in the Bolivarian Revolution and the relationship between the state and popular power, where the Community Councils are often recognized as an institution of the state unless able to be appropriated by popular actors and developed

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<sup>14</sup> The regularly-meeting assemblies, such as the National Liaisons Meeting and the Caracas Metropolitan Assembly, are also important in advancing the political agenda of the movement. The point being made here is that the moment of *encuentro* crystallizes the politics of the movement and clarifies where the movement is in its national development.

autonomously from the state.<sup>15</sup> While publicly recognizing President Chávez as the '*máximo líder*' of the revolution, as do many other popular organizations, the CTU movement is internally engaged in regular and pointed criticism of state institutions, even at times of Chávez himself. *Encuentro* syntheses often refer to the Venezuelan state as the '*Estado Burgués*' (Bourgeois State) and speak of the need to transform it into a socialist state. The syntheses demonstrate that the CTU movement is developing a deeper analysis of the state as corrupt, bureaucratic, and clientelistic, with institutions that systematically undermine the construction of popular power by attempting to interfere in autonomous spaces and distort the politics of *el pueblo* (the people).<sup>16</sup> Many of the proposals of the syntheses suggest that in the face of this problem the construction and exercise of popular power is necessary in order to realize Twenty-First Century Socialism, but it is getting increasingly difficult to do so. From the experiences that I have had observing The Methodology in various settings, perhaps the most important revelations that the analysis draws out are these nuances of the relationship with the state. Hence, despite the fact that most CTU activists support the Chávez government, this analysis has spurred proposals for greater autonomy and self-governance.<sup>17</sup> Reiterating Lefebvre (2009: 134) once again, the analysis and transformation of practice increasingly leads to the exercise of *autogestión*: a group's ability to understand and 'to master its own conditions of existence.'

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<sup>15</sup> See also Motta (2011a) and García-Guadilla (2008) for more on this subject.

<sup>16</sup> For example, the recent program *Plan Barrio Nuevo Tricolor*, mentioned in Chapter 1, which repairs barrio houses and paints them different colors, has fallen under this critique. See Chapter 6 for more on this issue.

<sup>17</sup> While there is also a critique of capitalism, particularly around the impact that land speculation has had on cities (see Chapter 3 for a discussion on the history of land monopolies and speculation in Venezuela), these debates tend to be more general and have resulted in fewer precise proposals for action. Two concrete proposals that have come out of this analysis have been the Land Bank, which the passage of the Urban Land Regularization Reform Bill in 2011 authorized to be created, and the creation of New Socialist Communities, new self-built urban communities that are being driven by the Pioneers and supported by the CTUs. This second example is discussed further in Chapter 6.



## PRODUCING COLLECTIVE LIVED SPACE: UNITY THROUGH DIFFERENCE

What is additionally profound and meaningful about The Methodology's process is expressed in the words of Marcelo who was quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

[The popular education methodology] is a political instrument... because you participate and you are the generator of a politics... It's from the common people. I mean, you put your knowledge here and from your knowledge we are going to see how to improve all of our knowledges... It's a socialist methodology... First, you plan from the people, with the people, for the people... And using another method someone else plans for you. They are planning your life. They are planning your development in the world. They are completely dominating you (Marcelo, CTU activist, Anzoátegui State, personal interview, 29 May 2010).

Marcelo's summary of what makes The Methodology valuable to the movement – the lived knowledges of participants and the rejection of top-down power relations in favor of collective political construction – are also the characteristics that allow The Methodology to be a tool for producing collective lived space.

To understand the significance of this for urban transformation first requires a re-engagement with the theoretical understanding of 'lived space' that is drawn from Henri Lefebvre. As was discussed in Chapter 2, lived space is a dimension of space that is produced by local practices and people's lived knowledges, referred to as *conocer*. These practices and knowledges are often 'illegible' to dominant power relations (e.g. the state) (Scott 1998: 24)

and, therefore, not able to be fully captured and homogenized (Lefebvre 1991/1974).<sup>18</sup> As a result, lived space is characterized by creativity and difference. We have already seen in Chapter 4 how the formation of an Urban Land Committee is premised on the *conocer* of barrio inhabitants, the Barrio Charter being the most obvious example. Even the process of marking the territory of the CTU, mapping the barrio, and numbering the houses depends on the lived space knowledge of residents, who are familiar with the peculiarities of each place.

Lived space struggles for room in the contemporary era of what Lefebvre calls 'abstract space,' which is produced by capitalism and enforced (sometimes violently) by the state for the benefit of capital accumulation. Unlike lived space, whose essential attribute is difference, the state and capital seek to fragment, homogenize, absorb and crush other kinds of space and social relations (recall the idea of modernization, discussed in Chapter 3, which has informed the production of urban space in Venezuela). They do this, in part, 'by means of epistemology and seek to institute a supposedly absolute knowledge [*saber*] which is in fact no more than a pale imitation of divine wisdom' (Lefebvre 1991/1974: 414). Recall from Chapter 2 that *saber* is abstract knowledge that can be mass-produced and disseminated across space; technocratic knowledge falls under this category. Abstract space's belief that this type of knowledge is absolute reflects an attitude towards the production of space that attempts to '[exclude] the necessary role of local knowledge and

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<sup>18</sup> Lefebvre (1991/1974: 50) goes so far as to suggest that lived space can only be produced through art forms and not words. I do not share that view, and already in the description of The Methodology am suggesting otherwise. However, I would point out that during the writing of *The Production of Space* (1974) Lefebvre had other matters on his mind. With a particular critique of Lacan, he was concerned that critical theory was displacing the analysis of social relations for analysis of discourse, and confusing language for knowledge (ibid.: 36, 60-70, 160-5). This, I would argue, propelled him to stake out the other extreme: that 'lived space' is 'limited to works, images and memories' (ibid.: 50). In his earlier work (1996/1968), Lefebvre expressed a more dynamic sense of lived space when he argued that the 'right to the city' involved returning the city to *oeuvre*, which I suggest in Chapter 6 expresses the 'art of living' and as such is created through lived space and knowledges. Throughout the thesis, what I have drawn from Lefebvre's concern is the more general awareness of power that is exercised through epistemologies, which produce distinct spatial moments.

know-how' (Scott 1998: 6) and seeks instead to impose order and control (ibid.; Nicholls 2008: 843). Where this manifests most acutely is in the production of the city.

Just as the multiple dimensions of space are never truly separate from one another, but rather work in dialectic with each other, so too are lived knowledges (*conocer*) and abstract knowledges (*saber*) mutually informed by each other. For example, as was discussed in Chapter 4, the *levantamiento* (survey/uprising) process involves the fusion of *saber* with *conocer*, producing a powerful 'grassroots urban planning' (de Souza 2006: 327). Hence, rather than see these two knowledges as mutually exclusive, it should instead be recognized that the concern mounted by Lefebvre and others is around the exercise of power (see Slater 1994, 2004; Scott 1998; de Souza 2006). Abstract space then is the 'collusion between [a certain kind of] "knowledge" and [a certain kind of] "power"' (Lefebvre 1991/1974: 415). Lefebvre argues that this collusion

must be forcefully exposed, as must the purposes to which bureaucracy bends knowledge's specialization. When institutional (academic) knowledge sets itself up above lived experience, just as the state sets itself up above everyday life, catastrophe is in the making. Catastrophe is indeed already upon us (ibid.).

For this reason, lived space, with its groundedness in everyday life and lived knowledges and its inherent difference, is potentially able to break out of these hierarchical social relations and rupture abstract space.

Before developing this analysis further, we can begin to draw out why the methodological practice of the CTUs constitutes the production of lived space and is, therefore, involved in

the transformation of urban space. As Marcelo explains above, The Methodology starts from knowledges that come directly from the lived experiences of CTU activists, which are often place-specific and, accordingly, infused with idiosyncrasies. In this way, the political development of the CTU movement is rooted in the local experiences and knowledges of barrio communities. Carlos from Lara State explains,

Our fundamental organizational seed begins in the local, in the barrio, with all the difficulties [that it brings]. And from there it begins to progress. It wasn't that it was first created at the national level and then later addressed the local. It was born in the reverse...

At first... the land committees were only local in the barrio and they only saw establishing conditions for their communities, the small stuff. But out of the small, as my father says, is born the large. And from there the local begins to develop experiences through the Urban Land Committees: in transformation, in involving the people, mobilizing, above all organizing, and getting others involved, including young people and kids. Orienting politics at the local, in the barrio; giving a solution to the local. At times the solutions weren't so material – because maybe there wasn't a lot of money or resources to be able to get material solutions. But [the CTUs] did drive activities that ended up finding solutions in that sense. But it was principally about culture and meeting each other. That's why we don't give up on the *encuentros*, because in the moment that we meet each other, we debate, we continuously examine our present-day reality – from there we can jump forward to where we want to go.

What do we want our communities to be?... We generate expectations, but we generate expectations that are collectively constructed. They aren't constructed by... what happens to occur to an intellectual. No, it has to do with popular knowledge, with the communities' own knowledge. And from there another step is taken, maybe it's a little bit further out, articulation with different Urban Land Committees...' (Carlos, CTU activist, Lara State, personal interview, 10 April 2010).

Carlos's words suggest that coming together and learning from each other has been a slow, progressive process. He also suggests that by practicing *encuentro* and the sharing and analysis of lived knowledges that The Methodology facilitates, the movement has been able to both address local concerns and begin to collectively examine shared concerns.

Through the use of The Methodology the CTU movement is turning what has historically been a limitation to popular organization – localized and fragmented social relations – into a launching pad for the construction of popular power (Marcelo, CTU activist, Anzoátegui State, personal interview, 29 May 2010). Hence, rather than only engaging at a single scale (e.g. the local *barrio*) and 'treating the differences at that scale as *the* fundamental line of political cleavage' (Harvey 2000: 79, emphasis in original), as might have historically been the case, these diverse lived knowledges are used so as to construct popular power, or what Hart (2002: 37) has called, a 'politics of alliance'.<sup>19</sup>

Importantly, The Methodology explicitly builds on the specific experiences and unique identities of each locality, in other words, the 'geographies of difference.' Thus, the local

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<sup>19</sup> For Hart (2002), a politics of alliance is also premised on the stitching together of heterogeneous localities.

territory is acknowledged as the starting point, and valued as such, and those experiences are then shared across localities in order to co-construct a collective political identity and a macro-analysis of what the CTU movement across the country is experiencing. This has helped the CTUs to articulate as a national popular movement while still preserving (even honoring) local identities and differences. In addition, the relationship between the local CTUs and the other scales of articulation – whether the Metropolitan Assembly or the national movement – flows in multiple directions. For example, ‘Take it back to the local’ is a common refrain within the movement, reflecting the national movement’s attempt to be driven by local decision-making.

It is this dialectical relationship between local, self-determining organizations (individual Urban Land Committees) and articulation at wider scales that makes the CTU movement unique in the Venezuelan experience. This type of articulation signals the constitution of new urban social relations, which in turn has implications for transforming urban space. In particular, what is suggested by the above discussion is that in stitching together the geographies of difference and the multiple, heterogeneous local knowledges (*conocer*) of barrio inhabitants, the CTU movement is producing another scale of lived space, what I identify as ‘collective lived space’, thus reshaping how urban space is conceived and produced by barrio residents across Venezuela.

### **PRODUCING COLLECTIVE LIVED SPACE: COLLECTIVITY**

An aspect of this wider scale of lived space that is not readily addressed by Lefebvre’s concept is its collectively produced nature. Evident in the process and principles of The Methodology and the spaces of articulation is a commitment to the construction of

*collective* knowledge, identity, analysis and solutions. It is both an orientation towards the collective as the agent of social transformation and the construction of that agent. As Carlos said above, 'We generate expectations that are collectively constructed.' Again and again, CTU activists talk about the need to build a popular politics and change the urban by thinking and acting collectively. Carlos goes on,

We have a politics that we think is important, that has weight and that we want to share in other spaces with people who are in the same struggle. It could be that it develops here or that there are others that do something similar. One maxim of [a CTU activist from Caracas] is: "What do you do? What do I do? And what can we do together?" We need to know each other and learn from each other. We need to confront the processes that we are going through in order to move to the next step. Organization is what permits you to have an impact in those spaces. You could be alone and have ideas but you don't have anyone behind you. If the ideas come from debate and mutual construction they have more weight.

This suggests that more than simply 'difference' is necessary to provoke urban transformation. Rather, 'power with', or popular power, are critical to the CTU movement's strategy to change the city. Pedro explains his understanding of the movement's orientation towards the construction of this popular power.

I am going with the majority, even if the majority is wrong and I'm the one who is right... But I will never go alone... I'll go in community... Three or four is a lot – alone nothing. Where are we going [as a movement]? Where the

majority decides. What are we going to construct? What the majority decides. Ah – am I going to influence it? Yes. Am I going to give my opinion? Yes. Am I going to have criteria? Yes... But listen, we construct it in consensus. It's not just about majority, nor about crushing anyone, nor about insulting the other. It's collective construction... that's where the Urban Land Committees are going (CTU activist, Caracas, personal interview 18 May 2010).

Popular education practices that aim to transform the world also emphasize the connection between individual transformation, the development of new individual subjectivities, and collective transformation (Kane 2001: 221). Peter McLaren (2000: 118) describes the potential revolutionary agency that such a process fosters as

an agency that helps to forge among the oppressed themselves a sense of the authority to act concretely and with specific social outcomes in mind, a praxis that connects power to meaning, thought to action, and *self-empowerment to social empowerment*, and that joins the confidence of controlling one's own destiny to a larger collective power of reclaiming history for the poor and the powerless (emphasis added).

Latin American popular educator activist Maria Clara Bueno Fischer adds to this by emphasizing that the collective is *the key actor* in the transformation of society. About this she says, 'even conscientisation – on its own does not change reality and people need to organise collectively to be "subjects" of change, to be able to take action and put forward proposals' (quoted in Kane 2001: 232).



This is further expressed in the process of collective debate and consensus that the CTU movement strives for in assembly and *encuentro* organizational spaces.<sup>20</sup> Richard Pithouse (2006) has similarly described a practice in South Africa in which the meetings of the Abahlali movement is 'central to radical process'. He reiterates the importance of arriving at consensus and argues that for 'a hugely diverse group of vulnerable people with profound experiences of marginalization and exploitation in multiple spheres of life,' it is necessary that the synthesis, or outcome, is not determined elsewhere but that 'the meeting produces a result we are all committed to' (ibid.: 28). As Marcelo suggests in the epitaph of this chapter, the process of collective knowledge production that the CTUs have adopted is itself a political strategy to rupture traditional power relations premised on hierarchical knowledges (such as that employed by abstract space) and to produce new collective subjectivities founded on the principles mentioned above.

The emphasis on a collective politics that is constructed through the participation of many individuals is also critical to understanding the Bolivarian Revolution. This is a politics that does not look towards the state for its articulation. Instead, a collective politics, of the kind that Pedro and Carlos talk about, turns towards the knowledges of inhabitants for direction. Such a production of collective lived space strikes at the heart of Lefebvre's (1991/1974; 2009) concern about the human experience of alienation – the result of abstract space – and the need to develop a politics of what he calls *autogestión*, which explicitly rejects the dominant power relations usually employed by the state.

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<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, I would be careful to point out that though some kind of consensus is usually reached in the CTU assemblies and *encuentros* (even if this requires that debate carries on over several meetings, see Chapter 6), this does not mean that certain people do not have more influence than others or that some activists are more likely to set the agenda and offer proposals for action than others, in itself suggesting a form of power within the movement that is not fully investigated in this research project.

## THE CONTINUOUS PRODUCTION OF COLLECTIVE LIVED SPACE

The production of collective lived space, however, is intensely uneven, unstable, and at times contested. For example, while The Methodology continues to be used and invoked in almost all of the regional and national spaces of the movement, it is not an uncontested strategy for developing the movement. For example, in 2006, the spokespeople from the state of Monagas did not approve of The Methodology and the principles that inform it as a suitable model for popular organization (Juana, CTU activist, Caracas, personal interview, 26 April 2010). Now, several other regions have raised this concern and are seeking a more regimented organizational structure, in part to offset the strong influence of the Caracas-based CTUs (Sofia, CTU activist, Aragua State, personal interview, 19 May 2010; National Liaisons Meeting, 22 May 2010; personal communications).

Rootedness in geographies of difference, on the one hand, and the push to form a national identity with a common vision, on the other, have always existed in tense balance for the CTU movement (Cristóbal, CTU activist, Caracas, personal interview, 5 June 2010). This is clearly exemplified in the debate about whether or not to adopt the identity of the Pobladores Movement, which was discussed in Chapter 4. As Gillian Hart (2002: 28) suggests, 'the "unities" constructed through practices and processes of articulation are almost always contradictory, and must be continually renovated, renewed, and re-enacted.' Likewise, the question of whether or not the CTU movement should consider itself as part of the Pobladores Movement reflects the apparent contradiction between *difference* and *collective* that this chapter has suggested is the foundation of collective lived space.

What is important to recognize both in Hart's comments and in the CTU's commitment to ongoing analysis and transformation of practice is the sense of process. That is, the

production of collective lived space and, in turn, the transformation of urban space must be continuous. Not only that, but with each cycle of practice come new understandings of the political.

### **THE STRUGGLE TO PRODUCE COLLECTIVE LIVED SPACE: THE SCHOOL FOR ACTIVISTS**

Beyond the internal contradictions of the movement, the CTUs face other struggles in their attempt to produce collective lived space. This final section intends to ground the preceding discussion in the concrete experience of First Pobladores Movement School for Activists. Engagement with a specific lived experience also allows the body as a producer of space to come to the forefront of the discussion. As David Harvey (2006: 37) says of Raymond Williams's work,

we should, [Williams] again and again insists, never forget the brute ugliness of the realities of lived experience for the oppressed. We should not aestheticize or theorize those lived realities out of existence as felt pains and passions. To do so is to diminish or even to lose the raw anger against injustice and exploitation that powers so much of the striving for social justice. The formulaic view that 'truth is beauty,' for example, deserves to be treated with the wrath that Nesta [a fictional character] metes out.

Echoing the idea of truth discovery, mentioned above, that perhaps up to this point has been presented in a too-pristine light, the purpose of this section is to recognize that the production of collective lived space in Venezuela still takes place within a context of socio-spatial segregation and the associated daily struggles of barrio life, which complicate the

CTU movement's ability to 'transform (urban) reality' (Freire 1970) and compel the movement to engage in the additional strategy of *cogestión* (co-development) with the state.

On the morning of July 28, 2009, a group of 21 CTU activists and myself arrived at barrio *12 de Octubre* (October 12), Falcón State, in northeastern Venezuela in order to prepare for the First Pobladores Movement School for Activists. The barrio – a cluster of a dozen half-finished, two-room houses and a community center (see Photo 11, p. 224) – was to be the host of the school, which took place 30 July to 9 August 2009. I accompanied this preparation team ahead of the almost-100 school participants and acted as a participant-observer throughout much of the preparation in the weeks and days leading up to the school, as well as during the school itself. With a digital video camera in hand, I also became the school's official-unofficial videographer, which became a way for the movement to have documentation of its experience.

**Photo 11: 12 de Octubre Barrio, Falcón State**



The 12 de Octubre houses were designed by the inhabitants in partnership with an architect from the Central University of Venezuela. They were designed to make the use of the natural environment for heating, cooling, even material for housing construction, and to provide space for 'endogenous economic development'. The houses themselves were entirely built by the inhabitants. Photo by author.

For several years CTU activists in the movement had discussed the idea of a school that would focus on preparing barrio residents to understand the history of the urban land movement and urban land policy in Venezuela and to learn The Methodology (*Síntesis, II Encuentro Nacional del Movimiento de Pobladores*, Los Teques, Miranda State, 2006; *Síntesis, III Encuentro Nacional del Movimiento de Pobladores*, Maracaibo, Zulia State, 2008). In the end, the formal objective of the school was

To train ourselves as well-rounded activists of the popular movement in order to be able to strengthen the collective processes of organization, the construction of liberatory knowledge and critique and joint planning, with the perspective of transforming our reality, understanding fundamentally that socialism is constructed from popular power (Program, Shantytown People's Movement School for Activists, 30 July – 9 August 2009).

In terms of methodology, preparation and logistics, the school was not unlike the important National *Encuentros* that the CTU movement regularly holds.<sup>21</sup> Over the course of 10 days, guided by the process of The Methodology, the school became a time to share stories of activists' experiences, analyze the movement's relationship with the state, discuss housing and habitat policies, and learn from other popular organizations. How the school was organized speaks to some of the principles, discussed above, by which the movement attempts to organize itself. The school was entirely organized and facilitated by CTU members. This included the fact that a CTU was the host location for the school. Though many of the members of the Training Team were (and are) employed by different state institutions, the school was run autonomously by the movement, meaning no state

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<sup>21</sup> My own experience at the 2010 National *Encuentro* and several interviews confirm this to be the case.

institution had a say in the agenda of the school. The content of the school emphasized mutual exchange and the collective construction of popular politics. The primary distinctions from National *Encuentro* were the length of the school (10 days versus three or four days), the location (in a CTU community, rather than a university or other large facility), and the fact that the final synthesis would not serve as an official document of the movement. Additionally, the school offered forums and workshops to learn about topics ranging from the politics of urban housing in Venezuela (see Photo 12, p. 226) to brick-making. In accordance with The Methodology, these forums, too, drew on people's experience and expertise.

**Photo 12: School for Activists**



Juan Carlos, pictured speaking, is a founder of the Pioneers' Movement and activist in the Pobladores Movement. At the school he led workshops about the history of urban planning in Venezuela and the legal foundations for the movement's right to the city campaign. Photo by author.

In the months leading up to the start of the school, the preparation team, most of whom participated in the Caracas Metropolitan Assembly of CTUs and formed part of the national movement's Training Team, were intermittently occupied with recruiting participants from across the country and preparing the school's agenda. Then, throughout the course of the school, the preparation team met before and after each day's activities to discuss the experience of the day and to plan for the next day. These meetings often lasted late into the evening or early morning as the team also debated how to resolve the various crises that were unfolding (see below). Emotions often ran high and arguments erupted over the multiple roles that people had to take on, the sometimes unappreciative attitude of the school's participants, the conditions of the environment, and the lack of capacity to meet all the goals of the school.

Another responsibility of the team involved actively soliciting resources for the school, such as food, transportation, and mattresses, from state institutions. Rosa, who is often charged with organizing such logistics for the movement's national events, explained to me, 'People don't have money,' and the movement often depends on the OTN, local municipalities, or other state institutions for such things as transportation, accommodation and food (CTU activist, Caracas, personal interview, 9 May 2010). This is referred to as a strategy of *cogestión*, or co-development. The CTUs commonly describe this strategy in its ideal form as 'the meeting of equals' precisely because the interest is to maintain political autonomy while obtaining resources that barrio inhabitants cannot acquire on their own.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the preparation, from the outset the school was plagued with logistical problems, a

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<sup>22</sup> Lefebvre (2009) warns against the practice of *cogestión* as an ineffective way of transforming social relations and destabilizing abstract space. He argues that in order to create socialist space movements need to practice *autogestión* (see Chapter 2).

situation that the movement constantly faces.<sup>23</sup> The problems began with the departure of the preparation team from Caracas. Many of the CTU activists have little to no employment. Those that are employed have very little margin for 'extras', and transportation to a distant northeastern part of the country can be quite expensive. Knowing that this is a common inhibitor to attendance at recent national meetings and events, the preparation team had acquired the commitment from several institutions to provide bus transportation from around the country to the location of the school. For the most part, transportation was found for all who needed it, though not without some difficulty. For example, in the case of the preparation team itself, transportation had been promised by a state institution but never arrived. So, after waiting for several hours at night on a not-so-safe street corner in Caracas, the team finally piled into a community-run bus made for small school children. After an uncomfortable nine-hour, cross-country trip, the group arrived in *12 de Octubre* tired, thirsty, hungry and, after enduring the full force of the heat and dust of the desert landscape, looking for a shower. Very quickly, however, it became evident that these were not going to be easy needs to accommodate. Consequently, what had been planned as a 48-hour methodological preparation of the school turned into a full-scale mobilization to find water, food, places to sleep, and space for the different needs of the school's participants.

To begin with, there was no running water in the barrio when the team arrived. *12 de Octubre* is a recently-built barrio near the city of Coro in the state of Falcón (see Photo 11, p. 224). Located about 20 minutes from the beach, the terrain is largely desert. Water in the region is tightly rationed and only flowed to *12 de Octubre* every other day during set hours

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<sup>23</sup> The movement confronted the same experience in the organization of the 2010 National *Encuentro* when at the last minute the meeting facilities became unavailable, the food was never delivered, and the transportation was withdrawn.



in the evening. Like other barrios across the country, the community had several large, blue water tanks that were to be filled when running water was available (from 10pm to 6am) and then would be the source of water when the tap was shut off. As newly-built housing, however, the water system was not complete. The tanks had to be filled manually using a hose, and they had not been filled before the preparation team arrived. As a result, every other evening, several school participants stayed up late into the night to ensure that the water tanks were filled. Additionally, there were four showers and four toilets in the community center where the school was to be held, none of which had running water at any time. Water, then, had to be carefully shared and rationed – a practice not uncommon in the barrios where daily running water is hardly an expectation, but nonetheless difficult with nearly 100 people to care for.

Second, the food that had been promised by Inmerca, a food-distribution institution in the Libertador District,<sup>24</sup> had not arrived. Unfortunately, they did not admit that they were not going to provide the food until the day the preparation team arrived in Falcón. The problem was compounded by distance of the barrio from the nearest large city of Coro, and when the school bus left to head back to Caracas, transportation was limited. During the period of the next five days, the preparation team made frantic phone calls to local organizations, foundations, state institutions, and municipal governments requesting food donations. At risk was the success of the whole project of the school. Eventually some food was provided – in the form of bundles of bananas or bags of cornmeal – and those of us who could, contributed bits of money in order to purchase food, which was then carefully managed. Despite such care, the first five days of the school mostly consisted of coffee, oatmeal,

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<sup>24</sup> Inmerca is headed by Franco Manríquez, one of the founders of the CTU movement. See Chapter 6 for a discussion on how the movement attempts to appropriate state institutional resources and the limitations of such a relationship.

*arepas*, and bananas, and on some occasions food was short. Just when the pot of money had started to run out, a mayor from a municipality in the state of Sucre (to the northeast of Caracas), at the prompting of a prominent CTU activist who was not in attendance at the school, donated a large (undisclosed) sum which provided enough food for the next five days and allowed those who had contributed to be reimbursed. Finally, the preparation team took on the responsibility of cooking the food along with a few residents from the local CTU, because those who were supposed to serve as cooks for the 10 days had failed to arrive.

Though many other problems were encountered throughout the course of preparing and running the school, such as a regional electrical outage and a lack of mattresses or hammocks to sleep on, as the days wore on, the participants started to figure out how to work together to resolve these and other problems. Competition to use the bathrooms in the morning dropped as a rhythm for carrying water and sharing the space began to develop. Small teams were organized with the daily task of cleaning the facilities, working with the children in attendance, and filling the water tanks.

More importantly perhaps, tensions dissipated as people also started to recognize that the school's conditions were the conditions of the community in which we were staying. This in turn spurred a higher level of analysis about the political situation that the community confronted<sup>25</sup> and how to resolve these problems by working collectively. By the fifth evening when the electricity went out in the region and the school was forced to abandon its agenda and instead pass the time outside under the stars, most participants realized that this was

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<sup>25</sup> 12 de Octubre was in a protracted battle with the municipal government over land ownership issues. The community had been given title of the land after having fought against eviction from another barrio. By working with an architect from the Central University of Venezuela, they had then designed and built their own houses (even making their own bricks) according to an environmentally sustainable, 'green' design (see Photo 11, p. 102). Additionally, they had designed the community to accommodate local business enterprises and common space, such as children's play areas and the community center where the school was housed.

not a problem of the school as such (unlike earlier complaints that were directed at the school's planning team) but saw this as part of the wider political and economic problems that they were discussing in their daily debates. It was evident that, despite the many difficulties that the school faced, simply coming together (*encuentro*) around the day-to-day struggles of the 10-day event stimulated new thinking and new understandings of why the problems existed in the first place.

The purpose of the previous account is to bring to the surface a number of factors that are involved in the production collective lived space in Venezuela. First, the experience demonstrates that the organization and methodological instruction of a national event requires a significant amount of time, patience, active participation, and shared responsibility. In addition, material concerns are not to be taken lightly, and they factor heavily into the methodological process that helps to evolve the popular politics of the movement. In the case of the school, the logistical problems were quite extreme and had to do with both the community in which the school was located and the failure of certain institutions to follow through on their promises.

Second, the experience of the school reveals that the production of collective lived space is a learned, active struggle, not necessarily spontaneous or inherent as Lefebvre's formulation might lead one to think. Even the school – which was designed to be a space for learning, reflection and *convivencia* (shared experience) – became a daily struggle to enact the popular politics that the CTU movement tries to construct. Hence, not only the content of the debate but the making of the school became a political practice of lived space.

The experience of the school also raises a number of questions regarding the ability of

popular organizations to transform urban space through the production of collective lived space. The first is the extent to which the movement is dependent on state resources for its ability to engage in this kind of national collective practice. Preparation for the school counted on the ability of state institutions to provide key material needs, without which participants might not have been able to attend. Though it was evident that CTU activists and the 12 de Octubre community possessed more resources than originally thought, they were nonetheless insufficient for the survival of the school. Furthermore, this is not the only example of such dependency on state resources. In the early years of the movement's organization, the OTN made possible both the development of the Training Team and the completion of hundreds of local *encuentros*. Since the OTN lost much of its funding and changed directorship several times, the ability for the CTUs to organize *encuentros* on a large scale has become more and more difficult, so that in 2010 Ricardo explains, 'Before we did 150 local *encuentros* but we had funding then and there was a team who went around supporting the others. This time [in 2010] there weren't resources<sup>26</sup> and each had to do how it could and they couldn't. It's an issue of resources and organization' (Ricardo, CTU activist, Caracas, personal interview, 14 April 2010). The result was the lowest participation in a National *Encuentro* since the movement was born and similar logistical problems as those faced by the school.

The second concern is the extent to which this dependency – a problem faced by many popular organizations – might undermine the popular movement's capacity to develop an independent, transformative politics that is based on the lived experiences and knowledges of the masses and not on the technocratic interests of state institutions. In other words, to what extent is the CTU movement practicing *autogestión*, *cogestión*, or is simply dominated

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<sup>26</sup> The exception to this was BsF5,000, the equivalent of about US\$1,250, from the OTN (same interview).

by state institutions? This question lurks in the shadows of many of the debates within the CTU movement and is at times the explicit topic of debate (e.g. 'what is our relationship to the state' is often a generative question in The Methodology). This concern is a concrete reality in the daily practices of the popular movement in general.

## **CONCLUSION**

At the beginning we only fought for land tenancy, for the transfer of urban land. [Then] we started to grow, to mature, and to have a political vision further out, not just of land transfer and land tenancy. Precisely I think that this had to do with the maturity of the movement insofar as it is articulating with different actors, insofar as there is debate, there is studying, to the extent that it begins to have a greater perspective...

As Carlos's words illustrate, this chapter has focused on the movement's practice of exchanging lived knowledges through the use of a popular education methodology. For the Urban Land Committee movement, lived knowledge and the collective, critical analysis of it constitutes the basis from which the movement can organize itself, claim its legitimacy and power, and seek to transform urban space. In particular, The Methodology has been the backbone of how the movement has forged (and continues to construct) a collective identity at a national scale and has articulated an evolving political agenda that seeks to transform the social relations of the city in a more profound way.

The emphasis that the movement places on producing local knowledges and facilitating the exchange of those knowledges so as to construct a collective national agenda is one of the

aspects that sets the CTU movement apart from other barrio-based organizations in Venezuela's history. Their orientation to collective knowledge and analysis suggests that we reconsider Lefebvre's understanding of how revolutionary lived space is produced. Yet the limited financial resources available to barrio residents often means that the movement is dependent on state resources in order to join together to successfully organize spaces where this production of collective lived space is able to happen. As a result, instead of practicing *autogestión* (what we might consider as the full expression of popular power), the movement chooses (or is forced into) a strategy of *cogestión*. This is important to remember and will be discussed further in the next chapter through the discussion of the 'right to the city' and how this politics has taken shape in the capital city of Caracas.

## Chapter 6

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### THE RIGHT TO THE CITY IN CARACAS

*Capitalism, as a system, is a worldwide system. That means it's not just localized. The strategy that the popular movement proposes is that even when we are in a local struggle, we shouldn't lose view of the continental or the global...*

*If we are on the pathway of struggle against the system then we have to use all our weapons, our strategies, and occupy spaces – wherever they may be – that serves this politics.*

Carlos, Urban Land Committee activist, Caracas, personal interview,  
10 April 2010

On a Saturday morning in July 2009, Eugenia, an energetic woman in her early 60s who participates in the Metropolitan Assembly of CTUs, called to invite me on a *recorrido* (walk-through) of *parroquia* Antímano. *Recorridos* are organized for various purposes and usually involve local inhabitants, as well as visitors from other barrios or institutional representatives who walk through a segment of barrios in order understand what is happening in them. CTU activists frequently told me that the practice of doing *recorridos* on an almost-weekly basis was the very thing that allowed them to know other communities – even neighboring barrios – that they had never before visited. Having already been on several *recorridos* in other parts of Caracas, I could testify that the experience was eye-opening and important to understanding the diverse lived experiences of barrio residents. On this occasion, the *recorrido* was organized to take an inventory of abandoned buildings in a small segment of the *parroquia* and to identify those that could be used for housing or ‘radical endogenous development’ (the term often used for community cooperatives and locally-developed enterprises) (see Lebowitz 2006: 98-101). ‘Can you be at the metro station in 15 minutes?’

asked Eugenia. Accustomed to these last-minute events, I responded without hesitation, '¡Sí! ¡Espérenme!' (Yes, wait for me!)

At the metro station I joined a dozen other women, most of whom were part of their local CTU and participated in the *parroquia's* and *Gabinete de Hábitat y Riesgo* (Habitat and Risk Cabinet), one of the 'communal governance' bodies that was advocated for by CTU activists and that came into existence after Libertador Mayor Jorge Rodríguez's election in 2008. With clipboards in hand and led by Cristina, a small, athletic-looking woman who was active in the Cabinet, we set off to climb the steep hillside. Within a half-hour, several buildings had already been identified.<sup>1</sup> One building in particular had caught the attention of the women. It was a grey, unfriendly-looking, three-story warehouse that sat on an outcrop of the hillside. As the women explained to me, rumors were swirling that it had been occupied by a group of families, but none of them had ever been inside. '*Invasores*' (invaders), said one woman.<sup>2</sup> Undeterred, Cristina knocked on the tall steel door that must at one time have served as the entrance for large delivery trucks. After disappearing into the building for a few minutes, Cristina emerged to wave us in.

What awaited behind the doors was astonishing. Over the course of one-and-a-half years more than 35 families, who had been displaced by flooding, had managed to construct a mini-barrio inside the building, complete in the style of Venezuelan multi-colored brick houses (see Photo 13, p. 238). As we were given a tour and learned more about the

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<sup>1</sup> One of these buildings, which was owned by a beverage company, would make headlines when, after severe flooding across Venezuela, the Chávez government would expropriate the building and give it to the Pioneers in order to develop housing for 20 displaced families ('El Movimiento de Pobladores' 2011; personal communication 12 January 2011).

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 3, footnote 35 for an explanation of the political significance of this word. The use of this word by barrio residents towards other barrio residents reflects the struggle that the CTU movement has in politicizing the question of land, even within the barrios. This is part of the struggle for the right to the city which will be discussed below.



community, we discovered that they had created a miniature football field on the side of the building, had refurbished the first floor to serve as a location for resident-run small businesses (the business at that time was an auto repair shop), and were building dozens of more houses on the roof of the building. They had also organized an informal Community Council; informal because, in accordance with Decree 1666 and the Urban Land Regularization Law, they were 'illegal' and they could not be legally recognized as a barrio since they had occupied the site after 2002. Thus they could not formally register a CTU either. As a result, the entire experience, including the acquisition of electricity, was one of *autogestión*, in which the families had, clandestinely and without any outside support, occupied and redeveloped the warehouse for their own use. After a couple hours of discussion, Cristina and Eugenia assessed the work of the families as similar to that of the Pioneers movement and invited the community to join the larger right to the city efforts that were building across Caracas.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The community did in fact start to attend Pioneer meetings and by the time I left Venezuela in 2009 was in talks with Fundacaracas, an office of the Libertador Mayor, about becoming an official 'New Socialist Community' (see below).

**Photo 13: Antimano Occupation**



Rows of houses were built on the inside of a warehouse in *parroquia* Antimano. To the left are the women from the neighbourhood Housing and Infrastructure Cabinet in conversation with one of the young organizers of the community. Many of the residents in the occupation, which had electricity but no running water, were children. Photo by Author.

While the warehouse community is not a CTU, the experience nonetheless illustrates several points regarding the CTU strategies for transforming urban space that will be discussed in this chapter. These strategies, I suggest, can be considered under the framework of what Lefebvre (1996/1968) called 'the right to the city.' According to Lefebvre, the right to the city involves the 'appropriation' of space by urban inhabitants and the active participation of inhabitants in all aspects of urban space so as to change power relations in the city. As was discussed at the end of Chapter 1, what this means is that the right to the city might involve the physical appropriation of space, as is demonstrated above, but ultimately it is about producing urban space so that it meets the needs of the its inhabitants, changing the value of the city from 'exchange value' to 'use value'. On a small scale, this is illustrated in the transformation of the warehouse from an abandoned building to a living space for those who most need housing. This orientation to changing the city is also evident in the work of Cristina, Eugenia, and the other women in the Habitat and Risk Cabinet, which is focused on

the use value of urban land, that is, prioritizing what local inhabitants need the land to do for the benefit of the neighbourhood over what it could gain on the market as something else.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, the first aim of the chapter is to consider specific instances in which the CTU movement in Caracas has attempted to transform the city by appropriating urban space and by using lived space knowledges<sup>5</sup> to inform decision-making in the city. Three examples will be considered, all of which involve Caracas-based CTUs working *through the state* in order to appropriate urban space in the capital city. This is indicative of a strategy of *cogestión* (co-development/management), rather than one of strict *autogestión* (self-development/management), that was mentioned in the previous chapter. Hence, these examples will sit in contrast to the experience of the warehouse occupation and demonstrate the distinct opportunities and limitations that a strategy of *cogestión* might encounter. Examination of *cogestión* in these terms connects to another research question, which is to examine the opportunities and limitations of popular power's efforts to transform urban space, and is a second aim of the chapter.

This chapter is somewhat distinct from the empirical chapters that have thus far been presented for two reasons. First, the focus of the chapter is on the city of Caracas. The three examples presented here are specific to the experience of Caracas though they generate general questions about the struggle for the right to the city in the Bolivarian Revolution. The second distinction about the chapter is that the CTU's development of its right to the city campaign and the strategies that are involved in that effort are still in their infancy. As a result, the examples raised here include instances of failure (in various degrees) and struggle,

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<sup>4</sup> The classic example in Caracas is the sale of urban land to become a commercial shopping center, rather than put to work as housing, schools, parks, or for other community needs. In the 1970s and 1980s, this issue was also taken up by middle-class residents who organized the *Movimiento de Vecinos* (Neighborhood Movement) (Salamanca 1998).

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 5.

the outcomes of which are still to be seen. The chapter reflects an embrace of 'experimentation' that infuses the process of the Bolivarian Revolution, an orientation to political practice that acknowledges failure as part of the learning process and part of the construction of popular power. More than drawing clear conclusions then, this chapter juxtaposes Lefebvre's utopian projection of the right to the city with the concrete lived experiences of popular struggles and raises question about both the idea of the right to the city and the ways in which the right to the city is being claimed in Venezuela. In particular, what becomes clear is the way the Venezuelan state factors into popular movement struggles, characterizing the current right to the city efforts by the CTU movement as a strategy of *cogestión*, rather than *autogestión* in the way that Lefebvre (2009) argues is essential to the true transformation of space.

The first part of the chapter will examine the idea of the right to the city, drawing on Lefebvre and others who have begun to study right to the city campaigns. Following Edward Soja's (2010: 107) critique, it will be argued that most studies of the right to the city fail to incorporate a multi-dimensional spatial analysis, and therefore, limit their examination of movement strategies to those that involve physical occupation or material claims to urban space and 'seem to be little more than a slightly different way of speaking about human rights.' In contrast, by building on the theoretical framework laid out in Chapter 2, the first section of this chapter will elaborate a more complex, radical understanding of appropriation and, in turn, the right to the city.

This will then serve as the basis from which to examine three instances in which the Caracas-based CTU movement has attempted to appropriate urban space in the capital. These examples include the Land Registry Office, *Plan Barrio Nuevo Tricolor*, and New Socialist

Communities. Unlike other strategies of the movement that have been discussed in previous chapters, such as autonomous assemblies at multiple scales, the articulation of lived knowledges in the Barrio Charter or through The Methodology, or the construction of a national movement premised on local differences,<sup>6</sup> these examples involve the Venezuelan state in a significant way. As a result, the examples also serve to examine how state institutions factor into the CTU movement's pursuit of the right to the city. Developing this idea further, the final section will discuss how these instances can be considered examples of *cogestión*. This brings to light the ways in which the CTU movement is engaging with state institutions in the transformation of urban space – even as it attempts to change the territoriality of the state itself (Slater 1997: 265) – and the opportunities and limitations of such a strategy.

## **THE RIGHT TO THE CITY IN SPATIAL TERMS**

As was already briefly discussed at the end of Chapter 1, Henri Lefebvre's notion of the 'right to the city' has become a common demand for popular movements across the globe. Within Latin America, the idea was taken up in the 1970s (E. Fernandes 2007: 208). However, claims for the right to the city have gained increasing importance as urban crises have taken center stage in political struggles across the continent (if not the world). Certainly, not all movements who strive for the right to the city, or even those that study these movements, understand it in the way that Lefebvre meant (Purcell 2003: 576). For example, the CTU/Pobladores Movement is still evolving what it means by the right to the city, though its meaning is progressively coming to align with Lefebvre's position. The concern here is not that these movements 'get it right'. Rather, the radical political orientation of Lefebvre's

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<sup>6</sup> Some of these strategies might also be considered appropriation of urban space.

concept serves as a point from which to examine a variety of popular movement strategies (labelled as 'right to the city' or not), because it places emphasis on how power relations are being changed in the city.

In Lefebvre's book *The Right to the City* (1996/1968), the title concept, like much of Lefebvre's ideas, is expressed in poetic terms as the right 'to urban life, to renewed centrality, to places of encounter and exchange, to life rhythms and time uses, enabling the full and complete *usage* of these moments and places, etc.' (ibid.: 179, emphasis in original). This declaration about the importance of use reflects Lefebvre's concern that the value of the modern city has been reduced to its exchange value (the commodification of urban resources and benefits, most especially in the form of private property and land speculation), squeezing out consideration of the needs of inhabitants, especially those on the periphery (whether literally or figuratively). For Lefebvre, just as in *The Production of Space* (1991/1974), this prioritization of capital accumulation over 'inhabiting' – that is, 'living' in all of its material, emotional, intellectual, and social dimensions – is fundamentally a question of power relations, principally the power of the state and capital over urban inhabitants.

Thus, the right to the city 'stresses the need to restructure the power relations that underlie the production of urban space, fundamentally shifting control away from capital and the state and toward urban inhabitants' (Purcell 2002: 102; see also Isin 2000: 14). Following the notion that the production of urban space is not located in discreet places but involves processes across many places, the right to the city is a claim to 'command the whole urban process' (Harvey 2008: 28), extending beyond the boundaries of the city: a global right to the city. Emphasizing the extent to which the city would have to be transformed for the right to the city to be realized 'calls for,' said Lefebvre (1996/1968: 180), 'apart from the economic

and political revolution (planning oriented towards social needs and democratic control of the State and self-development/management), a permanent cultural revolution.' The meaning here is similar to Lefebvre's understanding of *autogestión* and democracy in that he argued these are social relations that must be constantly produced, constantly struggled over, 'even a struggle against the State that emerges from democracy' (Lefebvre 2009: 61, 134-5). So too must the right to the city be a permanent struggle.

For Lefebvre, the primary beneficiaries of this right would be the working class, a political agent defined by 'segregation and the misery of its "to inhabit"' (Lefebvre 1996/1968: 178), for whom the right to the city 'has a particular bearing and significance [because] it represents for it at one and the same time a means and an end' (ibid.: 179). That is, the right to the city is a goal of those who inhabit in misery and is also the practice or strategy for how to create a new city.

The question then becomes, what practices produce the right to the city? Lefebvre (ibid.: 174) suggests that the right to the city can be broken down into 'the right to *oeuvre*,<sup>7</sup> to participation and appropriation.' 'The right to participation maintains that *citadins* should play a central role in any decision that contributes to the production of urban space' (Purcell 2002: 102; 2003: 582). In this way, the right to participation signifies more than just 'the right to claim presence in the city' (Isin 2000: 14), or even *reivindicación* as the Urban Land Movement has done for the barrios.<sup>8</sup>

The right to appropriation ('clearly distinct from the right to property' [Lefebvre 1996/1968: 174]) 'means that inhabitants have a right to an urban geography that best meets their use-

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<sup>7</sup> Though not referred to specifically in this way, the 'right to the *oeuvre*' suggests the right to the 'art of living', which I will explain in a moment is directly connected to lived space and knowledges.

<sup>8</sup> See Chapter 4.

value needs' (Purcell 2003: 581; see also Soja 2010). As indicated, this questions the priority of individual property over other kinds (collective, etc.) (E. Fernandes 2007: 209) and suggests that the *use* of land for the social good is more important than personal ownership. We see this in the discussion about the CTU's Urban Land Regularization Reform Bill which emphasized what they call familial and collective land ownership, an idea that has faced significant obstacles in terms of existing Venezuelan law and state institutional actors (even those that theoretically support the redistribution of land to barrio inhabitants). Accordingly, appropriation might involve occupying already-existing physical space (Mitchell 2003) but also requires the production of *new* multi-dimensional space (Purcell 2002: 103). As Soja (2010: 47-56) additionally points out, these needs should be understood in terms of 'where things are put in space' (emphasis added), as much as *that* these things exist.<sup>9</sup>

Hence, the right to the city is not about changing one's own experience of the city by 'seeking membership in a qualitatively different way' (Isin 2000: 6). Rather, it is about changing the city itself: changing how the city is organized, what the purpose of the city is (use value vs. exchange value), who makes decisions in it, and how inhabitants participate in its production. In other words, the right to the city is the assertion of popular power (or in Lefebvre's words, *autogestión*) in all areas of urban production. It further means the full embrace of 'inhabiting': 'to take part in a social life, a community, village or city' (Lefebvre 1996/1968: 76), which should not be reduced to 'housing', despite the state's tendency to do so (see below). Inhabiting in this sense reflects Lefebvre's spatial category of lived space. This is, not just living *in* space, but living as an act of *producing* space (in all its physical, cultural, and mental forms) that is informed by one's lived knowledges (*conocer*). In this way, as was

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<sup>9</sup> Soja's (2010) example of the public transportation system in Los Angeles points out that 'equal' distribution does not necessarily mean 'just' distribution. For example, if public transportation resources are invested in wealthy neighborhoods that have more access to personal automobiles at the same rate as working class neighborhoods that rely on bus services, then the right to the city has not been achieved.



already discussed in Chapter 5, in as much as lived space could predominate over the production of the urban, difference would flourish.<sup>10</sup>

This engagement with the right to the city idea that Lefebvre put forward as the articulation of urban struggle in the late 1960s, and that has since been taken up as a call to action by a variety of popular organizations, reveals that the right to the city is more an expression of what ought to be than what actually is. Nonetheless, the concept is useful to the discussion about the strategies of the Urban Land Committees because it targets an analysis of the social relations that are involved in the production of urban space and the extent to which popular actors are participants in the production of urban space.

What is less commonly addressed by the theories and engagements with the right to the city is the role of the state in limiting participation and appropriation, a concern that Lefebvre expressed elsewhere (Lefebvre 1991/1974; 2009). The next several sections describe examples of the CTU movement's 'right to the city' strategies that attempt to transform urban social relations and thus urban space, which often find their limits in the state apparatus that purports to support the urban revolution.

## **NEW DIRECTIONS FOR THE LIBERTADOR LAND REGISTRY OFFICE?**

Fabiola, a CTU activist from La Vega, stood in the middle of the Caracas Metropolitan Assembly of CTUs, stabbing at the air with one hand as if to punctuate her remarks regarding who was to become the next director of the Land Registry Office in the Libertador

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<sup>10</sup> Several urbanists have linked this concept of producing urban difference to Iris Marion Young's (1990) work which argues that justice is not the making of sameness but is allowing differences to flourish without oppression (see Soja 2010: 78; Mitchell 2003: 31).

District. As she expressed her concerns, she moved around the wide circle of people who had gathered for the debate and raised her voice in anger about the mayor's choice for interim director because he did not seem to respect the authority of the CTU movement. The discussion lasted for several hours as others from the more-than-75 people gathered chimed in with their agreement or disagreement. This Thursday evening was one of many that the Caracas CTUs had spent in a frigidly air-conditioned room in the old city center where the focus of debate was on who to select for directorship of the Land Registry Office.

Upon the departure of Ana María Alarcón, director of the Land Registry Office since the 2002 decree that created the CTUs, recently-elected Libertador Mayor Jorge Rodríguez, who had personal ties to the CTU movement, agreed to let the Caracas-based CTUs nominate three people to the post, out of which he would select one. With the support of the OTN, the Caracas CTUs organized 12 commissions to go to each *parroquia* to solicit nominations from the *parroquia* assemblies (Marta, CTU activist/OTN employee, Caracas, personal interview, 11 May 2009). The Metropolitan Assembly collected the nominations and set up a small commission to review the candidates and make their recommendations to the larger assembly. In the meantime, Mayor Rodríguez selected Edgar Silva to be the interim director. Silva had previously worked with CTU activists in another state institution and had personal relationships with others (Edgar Silva, ex-Director of Land Registry Office, Libertador District, personal interview, 26 May 2010). After prolonged, intense debate, Silva was nominated by the Metropolitan Assembly and made permanent director of the Land Registry Office.

This was an opportunity for the CTUs to exert decision-making power over an office that is central to the distribution of municipally-held urban land. It was generally recognized that the right person in the post could open up the possibility for the reinvention of the Land

Registry Office. This was important for two reasons. First, the land titling process at the municipal (and national) level was essentially paralyzed. The regularization process that the CTUs are pushing for is not the sole activity of the Libertador Land Registry Office, nor is it even a priority, according to those who worked in the office. The principal activity of the office is to register land claims in order to assess property values for tax purposes.<sup>11</sup> This combined with an overbearing bureaucratic process and little political will meant that no municipal institution was charged with the primary task of seeing through the regularization process, and the movement seemed unable to generate the necessary pressure and influence from outside of the office. In order for this situation to change, the Land Registry Office needed to be turned into an aggressive advocate for land titling.

Second, the office has historically been designed to monitor and organize information regarding individual private land ownership (Ana, Pobladores Movement activist, Caracas, personal interview, 27 May 2010). However, over the past several years the CTU movement has been shifting its attention to politicize the assumption that land had to be owned privately and, through the Urban Land Regularization Law Reform Bill, has been advocating for other forms of land ownership, such as collective. As was evident in a personal interview, the previous director of the Land Registry Office had been antagonistic towards this kind of land ownership, arguing that it was against local code (Ana María Alarcón, former director, Land Registry Office, Libertador District, personal interview, 19 May 2009; Elizabeth Abreu, OTN, personal interview, 22 April 2009).

For both of these reasons, the Caracas Metropolitan Assembly of CTUs deemed it necessary that the new director share '*nuestra política*' ('our politics') in terms of reinvigorating the land

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<sup>11</sup> In a Metropolitan Assembly meeting in 2010, the new Land Office director explained how this second function was not actually happening because most property was either not registered or had been assessed at a much lower value than it was actually worth (3 June 2010).

titling process, helping to change the political orientation regarding land ownership, and recognizing the CTU Metropolitan Assembly – not the mayor – as his or her true ‘boss’. This final point was Fabiola’s main concern after she had allegedly heard Silva claim that he was the permanent director before the Metropolitan Assembly had even confirmed his nomination.

After being named to the post (by the Metropolitan Assembly), Silva hired activists from the Pobladores Movement to help him streamline and mechanize the land titling process (which had up to that point been done almost entirely by hand) (Ana, Pobladores Movement activist, Caracas, personal interview, 27 May 2010). In several meetings with barrio residents who came to the office searching for help in getting their land title he did encourage them to participate in the Metropolitan Assembly and to begin organizing for collective title.<sup>12</sup> In addition, a commission from the Metropolitan Assembly was created to meet on a monthly basis with the Land Registry Office staff in order to monitor progress and provide feedback. Within a few months, however, the commission had dissolved due to personal issues, and after less than a year, Silva and the team that he had assembled resigned their positions.

The Caracas-based CTUs were interested in occupying this space to put the office ‘at the service of the people.’ Ana who was part of Silva’s team said,

What I did understand is that with all this power that the institution has and with political principles... one had to try from the operational side to work for the politics of the movement... in order to begin constructing *with* the people. This is the criteria because these [institutional] processes are not

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<sup>12</sup> The idea behind this is perhaps less political than logistical. Collective title would mean few titles to verify, sign, and distribute, and some of the technical delays around mapping each plot and collecting hundreds of individual documents could be sidestepped.

ours (Ana, Pobladores Movement activist, Caracas, personal interview, 27 May 2010, emphasis in original).

The CTU Metropolitan Assembly, then, was trying to appropriate not just the employment positions within the Land Registry Office but in so doing saw this as an opportunity to assert a different understanding of property ownership and political organization, to create new processes that came out of the politics of the movement. On a small scale, taking over the Land Registry Office can be seen as an attempt to 'wrest the use' (Isin 2000: 14) of an institution that has historically served the interests of the state and wealthy land owners, first, by moving the land titling process forward, a process that is often resisted by local municipalities who often prefer to maintain possession of the land, and second, by actually fulfilling the office's primary job of registering land and collecting property taxes. As discussed in Chapter 3, monopoly land ownership has in part been made even more lucrative because of the failure of the local municipality to collect property taxes (Plaza 1981: 182-3; see also Martínez n.d.).<sup>13</sup> But how to actually 'wrest use' was left unclear and not adequately discussed by the Metropolitan Assembly beyond voting for a director and appointing a small commission of CTU activists.

While the intention was to change the processes so as to help them serve the interests of barrio residents, aside from the CTUs' internal disorganization, two other significant challenges arose. First, there was little political will from those higher up in the institution to support these kinds of institutional changes. Despite the fact that CTU activists and supporters ran the office, even the issue of re-initiating the distribution of land titles was relatively unsuccessful as bureaucratic hurdles, lack of institutional coordination, and

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<sup>13</sup> This second point is actually being more aggressively pursued under the most recently-appointed director of the Libertador Land Office, who is also connected to the movement (Metropolitan Assembly of CTUs, 3 June 2010).

resistant public officials continued to hamper the process. Second, the politics of the movement around collectivity, both in terms of collective construction of popular power and collective land ownership, is not usually the interest of those who come to the Land Registry Office seeking title. Most are trying to navigate the dense bureaucratic processes to resolve individual problems or needs. Ana explains,

Nowadays, the debates inside of the movement are very advanced regarding the issue of the right to the city – understanding it not only as land ownership but giving it another sense, which is the issue of habitat. It's not land alone, but land as *one* element of a living environment... how the people plan and in turn how they plan with their community... [However,] I think there's a gap there between what was created in 2002 and the political advances of the movement now, because the people haven't taken [the politics of the movement] up as their own. I see that this conflict exists: of a vanguard that constructs very coherent, very revolutionary politics, very much in the spirit of a new logic of the city, but in the end there are people – who are the majority – who continue internally organizing themselves around the issue of property. In that sense, I see the movement as very weak.

...[For example,] on the subject of the [reform] bill, there was a very important debate, perhaps from the forefront of the movement, but a very good debate putting into question the issue of private property, starting to see it not just as regularization but starting to see it really as a synthesis of how we understand the proposal for habitat. This includes trying to

transcend Decree 1666 that orders us to organize ourselves for regularization, and to try to propose that this [reform] law be not about private property, but about communal governance (Ana, Pobladores Movement activist, Caracas, personal interview, 27 May 2010).

The limited extent to which this politics has permeated into state institutional spaces and even into the barrio communities themselves is perhaps most evident in a technocratic institution such as the Land Registry Office. In other areas, however, the influence has been more significant, at least to the extent that there is significant potential for decision-making power to be made by barrio inhabitants regarding the improvement and development of the barrios.

### ***PLAN BARRIO NUEVO TRICOLOR***

*Plan Barrio Nuevo Tricolor* (PBNT, Three-Colored New Barrio Plan) is an example of one such project that was designed with the intention that barrio inhabitants would be 'taking control over space' (Silvia, CTU activist, Caracas, *¡Aló, Presidente!*, 28 May 2009). The outlines of the plan were presented to President Chávez during a special episode of *¡Aló, Presidente!* (2009), the president's weekly television program. CTU activists made a presentation to the president about the experience in project Gramoven, *parroquia* El Junquito. Gramoven is an area comprised of 29 CTUs, many of which are established on unsafe land. As Dora, one of the recognized barrio leaders of the project, explained while pointing to a displayed map of the area,

We are working with INGRA [a municipal land-risk management institution]

to do a micro-zoning study to know what is at risk in this area... We are also planning a pioneer camp, which is a politics promoted by the Urban Land Committees – a *barrio* for our *barrio*, in which the same community is the actor and constructor of the proposal: where does the field go? The school? What should the housing be like?... We are all articulated – we are one block (Dora, CTU activist, Caracas, *¡Aló, Presidente!*, 28 May 2009).

The experience has been emblematic of an ongoing debate within the CTU movement and specifically relates to a proposal that came out of the movement's 3<sup>rd</sup> National *Encuentro* (Juana, CTU activist, Caracas, personal interview, 26 April 2010). Gramoven highlights the movement's interest in creating spaces for articulation in each *parroquia* where comprehensive, collective urban planning could be done. At the moment of the televised presentation, Gramoven was lauded across the city by both movement activists and institutional officials as an outstanding example of popular decision-making power being exercised to meet the diverse needs of a *barrio* community (including economic, habitat, cultural, and educational needs). This is a 'form of politics [that creates a] place for the community to take power and to participate and to define what problems it has and to be able to see how, in one way or another, it can participate in the solution of those problems' (Silvia, CTU activist, Caracas, *¡Aló, Presidente!*, 28 May 2009). During the television show, President Chávez called the project the best thing he had heard in a long time. 'What you are explaining, Dora, is worth more than all that the planning office in Miraflores [the presidential palace] could do because it's being done by those who know, by you all' (Hugo Chávez Frias, *¡Aló, Presidente!*, 28 May 2009). In addition, for the CTU movement, Gramoven exemplified the movement's politics around collectivity, autonomy, and comprehensive rehabilitation of the *barrios*.



Shortly after the program, apparently inspired by what he had heard, President Chávez announced the launch of program *Plan Barrio Nuevo Tricolor* (PBNT, Three-Colored<sup>14</sup> New Barrio Plan). The original idea, as expounded by the Caracas Metropolitan Assembly of CTUs in a document called 'The CTU Proposal for Plan Barrio Nuevo Tricolor' (CTU 2009b), was to create a 'space for articulation' for all the barrio organizations involved in housing and habitat. These organizations might include the CTUs, Community Councils, Water Roundtables, *parroquia* Cabinets (see above), and others. The space for articulation was denoted as '*la carpa*' (the tent) and would serve as a regular meeting place where barrio residents could come to bring their concerns and needs, develop a politics around housing and habitat, and create a 'comprehensive plan' for barrio development, much in the way that Gramoven was organizing itself. This is the kind of work that Brazilian Marcelo Lopes de Souza (2006: 327) has characterized as 'grassroots urban planning' and involves barrio inhabitants conceiving of and implementing solutions to urban problems 'independently of the state apparatus.' As for the participation of the state, following the recommendations made by Chávez during his television show, the CTU PBNT plan additionally proposed that the state provide material resources to rehabilitate the barrios but that the organization and labor be left to the local inhabitants in order to 'fortify participation, organization and management capacity in the community and to generate immediate impacts' (CTU 2009b).

One year later, however, the project looked quite different than what had been envisioned by the Gramoven experience. A new wing of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Housing had been created to institutionalize and run the PBNT, residents now apply to the program on an individual basis to have their houses repaired, and paid labor is brought in to complete the work. Current director of the OTN and former institutional coordinator of the PBNT, Carolys

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<sup>14</sup> The name refers to the three colors of the Venezuelan flag: red, blue, and yellow.

Perez, explained to me that 'the spirit of *Barrio Nuevo* is to transform the barrio with the very community. It's to convert the barrio into a safe one; to address the issue of services in the barrio and to evaluate the housing to be able to convert it into safe housing.' She went on to explain that this involves repairing the houses of cracks and fissures or building a new kitchen. 'A pretty house is worth nothing if the quality isn't good.' In addition, the program 'has also allowed us to involve the armed forces in the community because the *carpas* are using them' to coordinate much of the work (personal interview, 20 May 2010).

While the idea that urban inhabitants should still participate in making barrio improvements still persists, even Perez's words demonstrate a noticeable shift from 'grassroots urban planning' and 'control over barrio space' to a limited kind of participation that is far the 'community taking power' that Silvia had expounded (above), as well as a shift to a distinct focus on housing alone. Additionally, the official pamphlet about the program explains that even the work, rather than being done by the community, is actually contracted out (MOPVI n.d.). In short, the PBNT is run by a state institution as a housing reparation scheme, and the repairs are put on display throughout Caracas as houses are repainted by the program in the three colors of the Venezuelan flag (see Photo 14, p. 255). In a tone of mild disgust and a flip of her hand, Suzana of *parroquia* La Vega tells me, 'They are fixing the façade and nothing more' (CTU activist, personal interview, 18 May 2010).

Photo 14: Plan Barrio Nuevo Tricolor



The three colors of the Venezuelan flag mark the progress of *Plan Barrio Nuevo Tricolor*. Photo by Lainie Cassel.

The concern about the PBNT and the point being made here is not that housing repairs are undesirable. In fact, they are an important and essential component to dignified living and well-being. Rather, the concern of the CTU movement closely follows Lefebvre's concern that urban inhabitants are active participants in the production of urban space – the production of material urban space as much as ideas about that space. The point is probably best put by Ricardo who, in a meeting with the Vice Minister of the Ministry of Public Works and Housing, asked of the PBNT, 'Where is the popular movement?' (MOPVI 2010) This sentiment was captured in interviews, organizational documents and various meetings and suggests that the PBNT, as it is being implemented, fails to include the participation of inhabitants as decision-makers and producers of urban space, abandoning the political underpinnings that made the experience in Gramoven so transformative in the first place. That politics involves decision-making and *autogestión* of the community to build or re-

build its own barrio, what Dora referred to when she named the pioneer camp as a central component of the Gramoven project. CTU member and Pioneer activist Paula explained to me, 'There isn't recognition from the Ministry of Housing that *el pueblo* can build housing. Even though we have demonstrated it on all the hillsides, for them it's better to not recognize that *el pueblo* can build its own housing because it doesn't sit well with it to let go of the business' (Caracas, personal interview, 28 May 2010).

Disappointment and frustration at the absorption of yet another popular political space by a state institution is obvious when the subject is raised.

'Once again the power to make decisions is lost and [the people left in *la carpa*] are just employees... There is a misalignment with what the people need and with what they are given. It's not the fault of the people in the *la carpa*. [The problem] comes from an institutional process higher up,' says Juana. 'It's not a problem if you are going to construct with me, but it is if you are going to impose. That's what really pains me' (CTU activist, Caracas, personal interview 26 April 2010).

In response, the movement has proposed two avenues of action. The first is to re-take the project by becoming actively involved in the *la carpa* to try to open up debate about the purpose of the program through active participation (Metropolitan Assembly of CTUs 2010a, 2010b). More recently (as of June 2011) the Pobladores Movement has revitalized the *Centros de Participación para la Transformación del Hábitat* (CPTH, Participation Centers for the Transformation of Habitat), which were a proposal of the CTUs from 2004 (CTU 2004). Similar to *Plan Barrio Nuevo Tricolor*, the CPTH was proposed by the CTU movement to

bring together groups of CTUs 'to assess and implement' plans for the barrio related to all aspects of barrio life (Juana, CTU activist, Caracas, personal interview 26 April 2010). The CPTH failed, however, when there was a change in ministers and, as a result, funding for the projects fell through. The project has been reinitiated as an autonomous organization to do the work of 'grassroots urban planning' (personal communications, 21 June 2011).

### ***PLAN CARACAS SOCIALISTA***

The final example of where the movement is attempting to engage in a strategy of the right to the city through *cogestión* with the state has arguably been the most successful. During the electoral campaign of now-Mayor of Caracas Jorge Rodríguez, activists from the CTU movement participated in the coordination and facilitation of *encuentros* in eight of the 22 *parroquias* in the Libertador District (Ana, Pobladores Movement activist, Caracas, personal interview, 27 May 2010; Paula, Pobladores Movement activist, Caracas, personal interview 28 May 2010; Fundacaracas 2009). The syntheses of these *encuentros* formed the basis of what is now known as '*el libro rojo*' (the red book) which details a plan for creating a 'Socialist Caracas' (Fundacaracas 2009). According to the red book, the purpose of creating a Socialist Caracas is to

transfer decision-making power to the united *pueblo* in order to confront real estate speculation and to achieve the integration of the city, with equitable distribution of land and urban services. It's a program that commits us to the creation of a new institutionalism that puts itself at the service of strengthening popular power in order to make Caracas a city that is more and more democratic and popular, more equitable and just, more

integrated and sustainable (Fundacaracas 2009: 7-8).

Many of the critiques and proposals detailed in the plan are inspired by prior proposals of the CTU movement that came out as '*el librito azul*' (the little blue book), which was mentioned in Chapter 4 (CTU 2004: 7-9; Motta 2011a). The first three goals of a 'Plan for a Socialist Caracas' come directly from the CTUs' long-held platform of struggle including:

1. The comprehensive transformation of the barrios
2. The rehabilitation of popular urbanizations (e.g. the *superbloques* that the government built, see Chapter 3)
3. The creation of 'New Socialist Communities'

In addition, the 'red book' adds further goals for a Socialist Caracas:

4. The transformation of urban corridors
5. The creation of a comprehensive system for urban maintenance
6. The conservation and rehabilitation of national heritage
7. The creation of socio-productive areas
8. The value and defence of human beings in the city

When Rodríguez won the election in 2008, he adopted *Plan Caracas Socialista* as city policy and charged the municipal institution Fundacaracas with carrying out the first three goals of the plan. Fundacaracas, founded more than 30 years ago, has historically sought to improve housing and habitat in the city (Marco, CTU activist & Fundacaracas employee, Caracas, personal interview, 15 May 2010). Its mission now is to

carry out the municipal politics of the socialist transformation of habitat and housing in Caracas which *incorporates popular movements and communities in a continuous discussion*, such as the formulation and production of plans, programs, projects and works, through decentralized and co-responsible management that puts itself at the service of strengthening popular power (Fundacaracas n.d., emphasis in original).

Additionally, Rodríguez hired a new director, CTU supporter Jose Rafael, and a team of CTU activists to implement the plan and the mission through the creation of 'cabinets' in each *parroquia*, such as the Habitat and Risk Cabinets that were mentioned in the introduction of the chapter. One of the core functions of the cabinets, in addition to assessing the needs of the barrios as Cristina and Eugenia were doing during the *recorrido* already described, is to create '*parroquial* governance'. According to Franco Manrique (2004), one of the recognized founders of the CTU movement and resident of León Droz Blanco, the only known barrio with collective land title (Antillano 2005), it is necessary to 'horizontalize the institutions in order to guarantee participation and popular protagonism. The governmental structures are vertical, the structures of the popular organizations are horizontal and circular, due to this situation participation and protagonism is not possible.' Recognizing this division, one of the proposals made in the red book is to create a level of governance that would serve 'as the space of *encuentro* between the institutions that is decentralizing and the communities that are articulating' (Fundacaracas 2009: 41).

The purpose of this type of *parroquial* governance is intended to '[act] as a catalyser' for *cogestión*:

It obliges the institution to leave its offices and go to the *parroquias* to sit down at the table with communities to create plans for transformation and, at the same time, it obliges communities to stop seeing themselves as islands, to organize and to articulate amongst themselves in order to sit at the table as popular power. The *parroquial* governments will be formed by area-specific cabinets in health, education, economics, habitat, among others, in order to integrate their discussions in the Socialist Parroquial Plan (ibid.).

The cabinets at the moment are meant to engage inhabitants in the urban planning process, enabling them to make collective decisions about the needs of the barrios and how to prioritize resources.<sup>15</sup> So while representatives in the traditional governance structures are elected, all urban inhabitants can participate in *parroquial* governance. The cabinets usually meet bi-weekly and are often facilitated by a CTU activist employed in Fundacaracas.

Fundacaracas has also undertaken the stimulation and coordination of groups that organize themselves as 'New Socialist Communities', a division within the institution that is led by Pioneer activists who form part of the Pobladores Movement.<sup>16</sup> New Socialist Communities are the municipal government's official name for the Pioneer camps that have been organizing since 2005 who want to build new communities on vacant land or abandoned buildings. The camps/communities in theory (they have yet to be built) are characterized by collective land ownership, active participation in the planning of the communities by families

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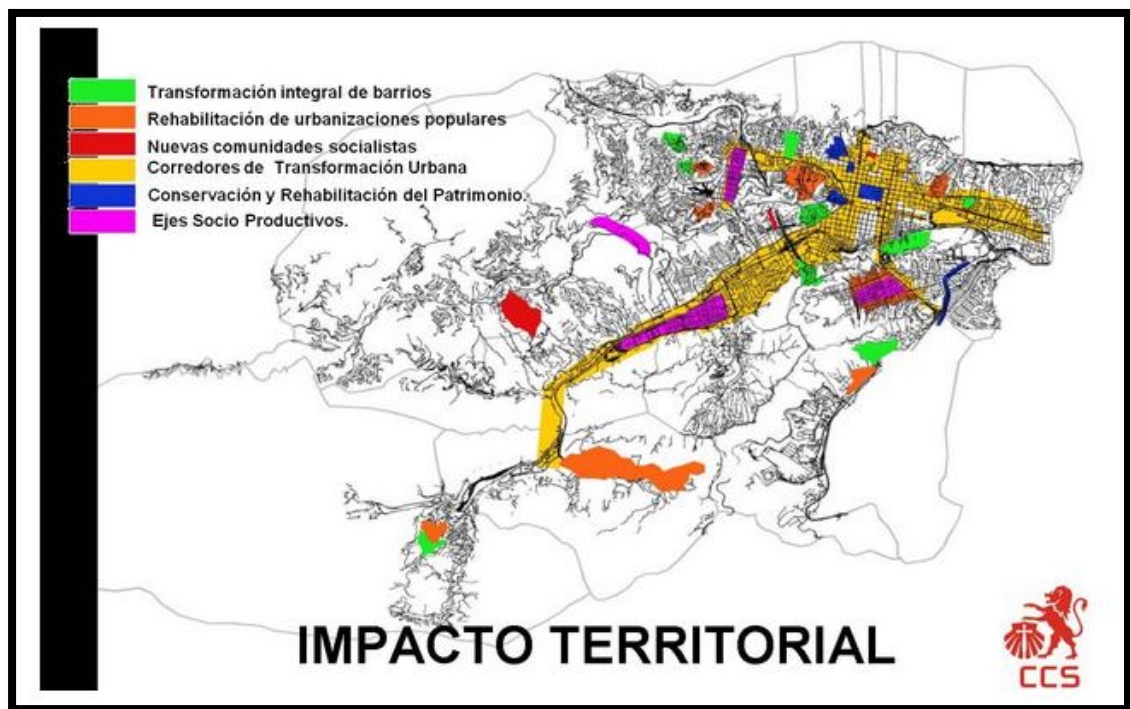
<sup>15</sup> Some have told me that the idea of the cabinets is that ultimately they will take the place of local representative institutions and be a point of direct, participatory democracy. However, it is unclear if this is a widely-held idea or to what extent the cabinets are actually prepared to do this.

<sup>16</sup> When asked in an interview what the distinction between New Socialist Communities and the Pioneer Camps were, Pioneer activist and organizer in Fundacaracas Paula said, 'It's the same thing' (personal interview, 28 May 2010).



who are pre-organized and recognized as members of the camp, self-construction of housing, micro-enterprises run by community inhabitants, and community-determined norms and regulations of communal spaces.<sup>17</sup>

Photo 15: Plan Caracas Socialista



This figure illustrates where and how *Plan Caracas Socialista* is having impact in the Libertador District. The red zone in the center is Pioneer camp El Junquito, the most advanced camp in the country. The pair of green areas in the upper-center of the map is the Gramoven project, mentioned earlier in the chapter. Retrieved at [http://www.fundacaracas.gob.ve/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=55](http://www.fundacaracas.gob.ve/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=55).

While *Plan Caracas Socialista* is still developing in the capital city and outcomes are to be determined, the intentions of the plan are reflective of some of the principles that Lefebvre argues are necessary to achieve 'the right to the city'. In different ways, the cabinets and the New Socialist Communities demonstrate the right to participation (decision-making over urban space) and the right to appropriation (the production of new urban space). The

<sup>17</sup> Since the Pobladores Movement meeting with President Chávez in January 2011 and the subsequent passage of various laws regarding urban land use, distribution, and the protection against eviction, the New Socialist Communities/Pioneer Camps have perhaps been the most notable success for both *Plan Caracas Socialista* and the Pobladores Movement, receiving relatively significant media attention and expanding to create new camps around the capital city.

*parroquia* governance that the plan promotes also clearly connects to the CTU movement's idea of 'communal governance', which Ana discussed above as one of the important breakthrough elements that the movement has recently debated and asserted as a new politics in their own understanding of the 'right to the city'.

Aside from providing some of the inspiration for the *Plan Caracas Socialista*, Caracas-based CTU movement activists have become more involved in the plan as employees of Fundacaracas. As of the summer of 2010, at least ten CTU activists, most of whom also form part of the national Training Team, were involved in the work of facilitating the cabinets and organizing the New Socialist Communities. As Roldan, a CTU activist and employee in Fundacaracas, explains, 'This [the plan] is our [the movement's] politics... We've taken the space of the institution to give continuity to the politics' (personal interview, Caracas, 15 May 2010).

As in a few other instances where CTU activists have occupied state institutional space, such as in the OTN mentioned in Chapter 4, the movement has also been able to use the physical space, as well as, the resources (e.g. telephones and computers) of the office to coordinate activities and hold meetings that are separate from the work of Fundacaracas.<sup>18</sup>

## **LIVING WITH THE STATE**

Chapters 4 and 5 have addressed the research question 'what are the limits and

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<sup>18</sup> For example, the committees of the national movement, such as the International Relations Committee, often meet in the Fundacaracas office after-hours. The extent to which the movement has access to state institutional resources has varied significantly and depended on which institution the movement 'occupied'. Compared to other experiences in the OTN or in Fundacomunal, a national state institution, the somewhat clandestine provision of resources for the movement through Fundacaracas has been minimal.

opportunities to the construction of popular power?’ by focusing on the roles that uneven geographies play in the movement and the material struggles that barrio inhabitants face. All the while, though, the state has been lurking in the shadows of the discussion, providing different limits and opportunities to the construction of popular power. The state has given semblance to the CTU movement in the form of the decree, provided resources and technical support through the *Oficina Técnica Nacional para la Regularización de la Tenencia de la Tierra Urbana* (OTN, National Technical Office for the Regularization of Urban Land Tenancy), and passed new laws that enable the movement to further its struggle for the right to the city. In addition, one cannot help but notice that much of the movement’s work – the Metropolitan Assembly meetings, the National Liaison’s meetings, committee and planning meetings, in addition to making photocopies, phone calls, etc. – is conducted in government offices where the movement is able to ‘borrow’ or ‘occupy’ space for a short time.

It is also increasingly clear that while the Venezuelan state has historically engaged in producing ‘abstract space’, as Lefebvre (1991/1974) calls it, attempting to suppress lived space knowledges and practices, the state itself is not pure abstract space; that is, it is not only informed by techno-bureaucratic knowledges. Rather, at least at this historical juncture, the Venezuelan state is also a site of spatial struggle, with barrio activists bringing lived space knowledges *into state institutional spaces* to help write Decree 1666, construct the OTN in its early years, and inform the urban land laws that are transforming concepts of property ownership.

With specific attention to the three ‘right to the city’ struggles that have just been presented, this final section is concerned with bringing the movement’s relationship with the state to the foreground. While every CTU activist that I asked denied that the movement has an

explicit strategy to 'penetrate' the state, it is clear that when given the opportunity (through employment, etc.), CTU activists work to put state institutions '*al servicio*' ('at the service') of the movement's political agenda. In each of these situations described above the CTU movement has pursued a right to the city strategy in relationship with the state. This has seemed necessary both because of the legal power that the state exerts and the resources that it can provide, particularly in terms of issuing actual land titles. This is often referred to by movement activists and in the movement's public documents as a strategy of *cogestión* with the state.

The form of *cogestión* that is evident in the above examples is not simply a 'meeting of equals', as it is often described by activists, whereby two parties (the movement and the state institution) engage in a project together as equals and are left unaffected by each other. CTU activists attempt to bring movement strategies related to assembly, popular education, and collectivity<sup>19</sup> into state institutional spaces, thereby opening up the possibility of transforming these same institutions from the bottom-up by introducing logics oriented towards collective lived space.<sup>20</sup>

Nor, following Lefebvre's (2009) concern, is *cogestión* only another form of absorption by the state of the movement. Rather, what can be discerned in the experiences of the Libertador District is that the lived space knowledges that popular power is premised on have transformative potential *at particular moments* within *specific state institutions*. However, such a strategy also creates limitations to fully realizing the right to the city in terms of transforming the power relations that produce urban space. Nigel Gibson (2006: 21) observes that 'the more successful a social movement is in gaining access to the state, the

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<sup>19</sup> See Chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>20</sup> See Chapter 5.

more its autonomy and independence are under the threat of co-option and professionalization.' Put another way de Souza (2006: 336) urges that though complete rejection of the state doesn't seem possible popular movements must seek as much autonomy as possible, to 'conceive their own strategies and implement their own agenda,' or else risk being co-opted by the prevailing notion of 'participation' which is now often used to mitigate the radical transformation of power relations (see also Leal 2007).

For the CTUs, however, the possible limitations or obstacles associated with the state are deeper than just co-optation. It will not be lost on the critical observer that there is an apparent contradiction between the values that the movement's organizational practices attempt to embody – such as the construction of popular power through autonomous organization – and the origins of the movement, rooted in state legislation and private property ownership. The origins of the movement certainly provoke questions as to how it can be an agent of urban transformation (read transform power relations), or in Lefebvrian terms, how it can produce lived space, when the most obvious outcome of the Urban Land Committees, as understood by the decree, is to effectively integrate barrio residents into the real estate market where the dominant logics of the bureaucratic state and capital prevail.

Importantly, Ana notes how the CTUs are often viewed as just an agent for land regularization, a view that is shared not just by barrio residents but also by state institutions that tend to reduce the CTUs to their technocratic functions (Ana María Alarcón, former director, Land Registry Office, Libertador District, personal interview, 19 May 2009).

I see [the movement] permeated by the same contradiction regarding the issue of the relationship with the state, how they see the relationship with

the state, up to what point does that relationship go, and what form does it take? I think that right now, as a popular organization,<sup>21</sup> there is a weakness, and I think that it's within this same vein. In the case of the CTUs specifically, it's the nature of how we are called together, which is by presidential decree. So it's as if from the beginning, for a lot of people, the Urban Land Committees were organized as an 'office' with the purpose of becoming a [state] institution in order to regularize land ownership. I think up to now that presence continues after eight years of having promoted the decree with this objective: to organize the people with land tenancy in mind (Ana, Pobladores Movement activist, Caracas, personal interview, 27 May 2010).

Hence, the very elements that define the origins of the movement, also pose the greatest threats to its capacity to transform the city. Regarding origins in state legislation, though the circumstance is not unusual to Venezuelan popular organizations, either historically or in the present – indeed, one has only to recall the *Asociaciones* mentioned in Chapter 3, Chávez's famous Missions, or the newly-decreed Community Councils to recognize the extent to which the Venezuelan state tends to instigate, co-opt, and/or 'manage' popular agency – it is nonetheless a decisive factor in the extent to which the right to the city can actually be accomplished.

Related to this complex picture is the fact that many barrio residents in Caracas, including those in the CTU movement, are employed by the state, usually – though not always – at the

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<sup>21</sup> It should be noted that here she is referring to the general state of popular organizations in Venezuela and not just the CTU/Pobladores movement. In 2010, many others talked about being in a period of '*retraso*' (slow down) for popular organizations. As Ricardo explains, 'It's not a demobilization in that we are leaving behind our cause. It's that there's so much work and all of us are involved in so many things that it's difficult to meet up. [This is coming from] the politics of the state and the politics of the movements' (Caracas, personal interview, 15 April 2010).

point of direct interface with popular neighborhoods. After months of participating in the CTU movement, it became clear to me that many of those who had gathered at the weekly meeting of the Caracas Metropolitan Assembly of CTUs and in the school for the day-long debate also worked in a state institution, whether in the OTN, the subsidized food distribution centers dotted around Caracas, health centers, or housing and urban planning offices. Pobladores Movement activist Gerardo pointedly notes, 'It would be absurd to say that any of us completely escape the contradictions of the [Bolivarian] movement – any activist in this process is, in one way or another, a functionary of the state or survives thanks to the state' (Caracas, personal interview, 6 May 2010). Remembering from Chapter 3 that expansion of the public sector has for the past several decades been the main source of new employment in the country and since the 1920s the state has provided subsidies in various forms to all Venezuelans (Werz 1991), it is perhaps not surprising that many activists in the Bolivarian Revolution make their living via the state.

However, this situation sits in awkward tension alongside incisive criticisms of the state. As various debates about popular power and Ana's reflections about organizational paralysis reflect, popular power's relationship with the state in the Bolivarian Revolution is what Benjamin Dangl (2010) calls a 'dance with dynamite'. Similarly, Pobladores Movement activist Ana powerfully calls attention to the struggles that the movement faces regarding the state.

It's difficult to construct moments of mutual respect and mutual recognition in order to advance with things. It's hard. It's hard because... [the discussion] is paralyzed by the issue of the relationship with the state: how we relate to the state; that the state is necessary, but up to what point? This discussion... is present in one space after another and says a lot about where popular

organizations are going in Venezuela. How much autonomy are we really creating? (Pobladores Movement activist, Caracas, personal interview,

Ricardo echoes this concern saying,

they wanted to subordinate the movement, to take the party position, to take on the politics of the Ministry. And we are going to associate ourselves [with the state] if it fortifies the work of the movement, not to support the state... And the state confuses that association, and it wants your subordination. So when we say we won't do something then [the state responds (in an angry voice)] 'Fine, there isn't a relationship... there aren't resources! (CTU activist, Caracas, personal interview, 15 April 2010)

Ana's question – 'it [the state] is seemingly necessary, but up to what point?' - is an intense topic of debate, even for those that support the direction of the current government (see also Denis 2007, 2008). In meetings and conversations it is common to hear pro-revolutionary activists talk about the need to eliminate the bureaucratic state – what is often referred to as the '*estado burgués*' (the bourgeois state) – and to produce a socialist state in its place (see Denis quoted in Spronk & Webber 2011). What this means in popular power terms is the devolution of decision-making power to popular organizations, so that power is in the hands of the people. This contradiction in which the state is the material enabler of popular organization (and personal employment), on one hand, and on the other, closes down autonomous space and subordinates movements to its own interests is a fundamental challenge in the Bolivarian Revolution from which the CTU movement is not immune.

Within the context of a so-called revolutionary state, the CTU movement is attempting to



put into question their very origins and envision another kind of city that is organized by and in the interest of popular power. Ana's reflections alert us to the multiple complexities involved in producing a new kind of city and the limitations that the movement faces in trying to do so. Ana calls attention to the internal struggle of the movement to produce an alternative politics that transforms power relations and that changes how barrio inhabitants think about the right to the city.

## **CONCLUSION**

The right to the city is an important objective in the next stage of the CTU movement's political project. It has come alive most noticeably in Caracas where CTU activists are struggling to change state institutions and devolve decision-making power to the hands of urban inhabitants. I have chosen to examine the ways in which the movement is struggling for the right to the city through the strategy of *cogestión* with the state precisely because this strategy reflects both the origins of the CTUs and the unique role that the state is playing in the Bolivarian Revolution: both creator and limiter of the construction of popular power. In the case of the Caracas-based CTUs, the movement is pushing for the right to the city, in the way that Lefebvre (1996/1968) articulated the term, by both working through select state institutions and attempting to change those same state institutions.

The historic position of the state in Venezuela, its role in instigating the CTUs, and its tendency to absorb social space has, at the same time, limited the movement's ability to radically transform social relations and wrest control of the production of urban space from state institutional logics. As popular organizations like the CTUs attempt to remake this social relation they find themselves at times unable to unravel this power relation that has

gone largely undisputed in Venezuela's history.

## Chapter 7

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### **REVISIÓN, RECTIFICACIÓN Y REIMPULSO: NEW BEGINNINGS**

*Mmm-hmm... power over space...  
So what you're talking about is 'popular geopolitics'.  
Radical geography in the hands of the people...*

Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez Frias in response to a CTU activist's  
explanation of the kind of 'participation' that the movement wants,  
*¡Aló Presidente!*, 28 May 2009, Miraflores, Caracas

This thesis has examined the emergence of a new barrio-based movement, the Urban Land Committees, who since 2002 have been engaged in a project to transform the cities of Venezuela. With the recognition that the movement is still quite young and has hit a new stage of struggle with the national articulation of the Pobladores Movement – which the CTUs have played the central role in developing – it seems premature to write a conclusion, as such. Many of the strategies that were mentioned in the previous chapters, the projects, relationships, and visions for a new city, are still being negotiated within the Bolivarian Revolution. Though the experiences suggest, on the one hand, that urban transformation is indeed happening, on the other hand, they also illuminate the obstacles to sustained struggle that the movement faces.

The title of this chapter – Revision, Rectification, and Renewed Effort, the three R's of the Bolivarian Revolution – reflects both the historical juncture in which the movement finds itself, as well as the spirit with which this chapter is written. That is to say, the chapter offers a summary of what has been said, a clarification of the theoretical contributions that have

been attempted, and a brief return to the current state of the CTU movement. More than anything, however, this chapter seeks to push open new doors for research and political practice.

## **TRANSFORMATION OF URBAN SPACE IN THE BOLIVARIAN REVOLUTION**

The purpose of this thesis has been to investigate the following research question: *how have the CTU strategies to construct popular power transformed urban space in Venezuela?* Secondary questions to support this are, what strategies have been employed, and what limits and opportunities does the construction of popular power face? Interest in these questions is compelled by an understanding that cities are increasingly important areas of study, most specifically among critical geographers, political economists, and sociologists, as they grow in size and exert greater political and economic power throughout the world. The research questions are premised on the observations that cities are special sites of struggle for democracy and popular power (Soja 2010: 96), and that inhabitants within cities, especially those that are counted as part of the dispossessed majority, are under-accounted for in research about the production of urban space. This section is interested in both summarizing the thesis and raising the specific lessons that have been learned about the transformation of urban space in Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution.

Chapter 1 established the parameters of the research project and named the focus of investigation around the Venezuelan Urban Land Committee movement. It discussed the methodological orientation around research relevancy and described the research limits and opportunities that were discovered through the fieldwork process. The first chapter also described the political context in which the CTUs have been established: the national context

of the Bolivarian Revolution, the transnational context of the 'left turn' in Latin America, and the global context of an urbanizing world. These intersecting factors make the work and study of the CTUs both unique and, at the same time, intensely relevant to concerns in other places.

The second chapter described the theoretical orientation that informed how one can think about urban transformation. I argued that it was necessary to link an analysis of barrio-based, popular power struggles with an analysis of the city that these struggles are attempting to change. I suggested that a spatialized view of social relations could help us to do that and drew on Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, Doreen Massey, Neil Smith, Edward Soja, and others for inspiration on how to strike a course that would expose the geographies of urban popular struggles. Two central concepts provided the basis from which to do that analysis. The first was Henri Lefebvre's (1991/1974) understanding that space is multi-dimensional, encompassing the physical (perceived space), the mental (conceived space), and the experience of space (lived space). Such a view of the city opens up nuances around how popular movements, despite their seemingly limited power, resources and mobility, can shape and change urban space in small and big ways. Throughout the thesis I have suggested that it is necessary to recognize that popular organizations transform urban space by exercising the logics of what Lefebvre (1991/1974) called 'lived space' and what James Scott (1998: 313) has called 'practical knowledge' or 'mētis'. Such a theoretical assertion has required embedded investigation with popular communities – in this case, in the barrios of Caracas – and analysis of how their lived space knowledges and practices have contributed to the production and transformation of urban space more widely.

The second concept that has driven forward the analysis of this thesis has been Doreen

Massey's (1993, 1994, 2005) idea of place, which suggests that place be recognized as a geographical moment of intersecting social relations, rather than merely a physical location that is politically constrained by set borders and parochial history. This was important for both clearly recognizing that the CTU movement is the articulation of highly localized, territorial organizations and for allowing the possibility that such territoriality is not necessarily politically limiting. With this, discussions about 'uneven geographies', 'geographies of difference', and 'power-geometries' were able to be explored as opportunities and obstacles for the CTU movement.

For the theorists that have formulated and used these concepts, however, the question of power, how it is accumulated and used in and through space and place, is clearly a central concern. In the thesis this concern has been predominant through the discussion about constructing popular power (power to and power with) in Venezuela today and in the exploration of the 'right to the city', which is fundamentally about overturning current dominant urban power relations. The theoretical premises for both of these struggles over power were discussed in Chapters 1 and 2.

Chapter 3 described the history of how urban space has been produced in Venezuela, emphasizing that this history creates limits and opportunities for future action (Lefebvre 1991/1974: 73). The chapter focused on certain themes regarding the production of urban space in Venezuela that were critical, if little-discussed, components that would allow us to better grasp the significance of popular power construction, urban land distribution, and the production of lived space that the CTUs are undertaking. I argued that the production of urban space in Venezuela has been characterized by social relations that are not uncommon in other parts of Latin America but, as suggested by Massey (1984: 119) 'local changes and

characteristics are not just some simple “reflection” of broader processes; local areas are not just in passive receipt of changes handed down from some higher national or international level.’ Thus, the processes that have been involved in the production of urban space in Venezuela manifest themselves in unique ways in Caracas. These processes include the monopoly of land ownership stemming from the colonial period which has resulted in what are commonly called urban *latifundios*; the logic of modernization which has sought to suppress the knowledges of the dispossessed in favor of techno-bureaucratic knowledges that seek to bring order to urban space for the benefit of capital accumulation; and a relationship of clientelism between partisan politicians and barrio inhabitants that for about 20 years successfully channelled political conflict and served to fragment relations between barrios. One unique characteristic of the production of urban space that sent some of these processes into hyper-drive was the discovery of oil in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the subsequent centralization of economic and political power in the hands of the federal state, and above all, the president. The chapter also emphasized various practices within the barrios and the modes of resistance that barrio inhabitants employed at distinct moments in Venezuela’s history that have served to inform the practices of today and contributed to the emergence of the Bolivarian Revolution under the leadership of Hugo Chávez.

Chapter 4 shifted attention to the empirical study of the Urban Land Committee movement and the effects of the movement’s strategies on the transformation of urban space. The chapter connected Decree 1666 that created the CTUs and the original point of assembly, the Caracas Metropolitan Assembly of CTUs, to a history of barrio-based struggles from the 1990s. From there the chapter made three main points. First, it argued that the work of organizing the CTUs, which involves mapping, taking a census, writing a Barrio Charter, organizing a community assembly, naming the territory and numbering the houses,

contributes to the transformation of what Lefebvre (1991/1974) called 'spatial practices' in the barrios, or the way physical space in the barrios is built, moved through and used.

Second, I argued that this form of organization constituted the basis for a progressive territorial politics that both draws its strength from identification with place and has the potential to construct a radical political agenda based on *autogestión* and democratic practices at wider scales. The territorial dimension of the CTU movement is both implicitly and explicitly inscribed in the strategies that the movement undertakes. Implicit because of the attention to diversity and difference that is constituted by uneven geographies of place; explicit because the movement attempts to re-make place by (re-)appropriating the barrio communities in which the activists are located. In urban Venezuela it is not the sudden 'awareness' of the global or a recent 'return' to place (that social science theories have begun [Agnew 1989; Pile & Keith 1997]), but the resignification of place – a territory, a neighborhood, a home – as the departure point, not limitation, for the articulation of diverse historical geographies of struggle. Chapter 5 addressed this last aspect in a more explicit way.

Third, Chapter 4 pointed to the multiple geographies that the CTU movement is creating and negotiating. These geographies include new spatial scales of Venezuelan popular organization at the regional and national scales.<sup>1</sup> These scales are evidenced by the formation and maintenance of the Metropolitan Assembly (as well as other regional assemblies that were only briefly mentioned), the National Liaisons meeting space, and the ability of the movement to move a national agenda, such as that which passed the Urban

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<sup>1</sup> The international scale of organization was not discussed, though this is a very important aspect of the CTUs work, having resulted in the formation of key relationships through the Latin American Secretariat for Popular Housing (SELVIP) and the Council of Social Movements (CMS) for the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America-Treaty of Commerce (ALBA-TCP).



Land Regularization Laws. The movement is also working through what I have interchangeably referred to as 'uneven geographies' or 'geographies of difference', which are the cultural, historical, and socio-economic differences between the places that constitute the movement. I argued that these differences present both an opportunity and an obstacle. It was pointed out that power is also inscribed in these uneven geographies, most noticeable in the strong influence that the Caracas-based CTUs have in the national movement.

Chapter 5 delved into one of the key practices of the movement, which involves the use of a popular education methodology (The Methodology) at local and national *encuentros* (meetings). Here the thesis deeply explored the significance of lived space, its meaning and importance to revolutionary praxis. It connected the outcomes of The Methodology to the production of lived space. I argued that by building on 'geographies of difference', the CTUs are able to produce *collective* lived space. This is space that is based on a knowledge that I referred to as *conocer*, which is experiential knowledge. Two lessons emerge from the experience of The Methodology. First, geographies of difference form the basis for political alliance; alliance which has both allowed the construction of a common identity in the CTU movement *across* uneven geographies and has also required systematic attention to its constant re-production. Scale again makes an appearance in this chapter as the CTU movement re-territorializes urban space through the articulation of a collective, national identity. Second, following the insights provided by popular education thinkers and practitioners, I argued that for lived space to be truly revolutionary, as Lefebvre hopes it to be, then it must be produced collectively. This point is significant because it marks a theoretical expansion to Lefebvre's concept of lived space, which he understands as produced by individuals through symbols, such as art. Rather, I have suggested that in order

to disrupt the power of abstract space and to preserve difference while at the same time overcome the various forms of alienation, fragmentation and homogenization that contemporary urban space tends to produce, lived space must be produced collectively.

Chapter 6 focused on the work that CTU activists are doing in the capital city's Libertador District. This is where the idea of 'right to the city' gets examined more closely both in theoretical terms and in concrete terms. Three instances of the struggle for the right to the city are raised as points of reference for how the CTU movement is struggling to radically change power relations in Caracas. Picking up on a theme that ran through the whole of the thesis – the relationship between the popular movement and the state – the three instances revealed that while the state has been instrumental in creating the CTUs, supporting them at different moments and of course passing legislation that democratizes urban land, the state is often an obstacle to achieving more significant urban transformation. Again, referring to another theme of the thesis – uneven geographies – the extent to which the state presents an obstacle or an opportunity varies from place to place and changes over time.

Yet because of the context of the Bolivarian Revolution, the CTU movement must engage in a politics that I have characterized as *cogestión*, which involves a type of partnership with the state, different than the strategy of *autogestión* best seen in the organization of the Metropolitan Assembly, the National Liaisons and the implementation of The Methodology. I suggested that this strategy of *cogestión*, or the relationship with the state more generally, is one of the key questions that the movement faces and must constantly negotiate as its interests shift, while the interests of state institutions also change. Most concerning is the state's tendency to absorb popular power initiatives and distort the political intention behind them, exemplified in the *Plan Barrio Tricolor* program. Moreover, the fact that the

Venezuelan state is involved to such a high degree in the creation of popular organizations suggests that there is a need to constantly problematize the process of constructing popular power (Gerardo, Pobladores Movement activist, Caracas, personal interview, 6 May 2010). The questions that Lefebvre offers behind the concept of the 'production of space' is what space and by whom? This seems to be central to the CTU movement's own concerns.

## **RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS**

Aside from the arguments about the transformation of urban space that have been drawn from the empirical research, this project makes at least two important general contributions to the study of cities and urban movements. First, the question of urban production is more commonly investigated from the viewpoint of the state and capital. Exemplary work that focuses on the state and capital as producers of space has come from Neil Brenner, Neil Smith, David Harvey, and Saskia Sassen, among others. Within this area of research the city is largely examined for its relationship to capital. In the 1970s, Henri Lefebvre (1970), David Harvey (1973), and Manuel Castells (1979) viewed the city as the product of the capitalist mode of production, processes that 'had nothing to do with the city itself' (Harvey 1973: 304). All three thinkers inspired a new generation of urban research, which was largely concerned with capitalism as the driving force behind the production of urban space: 'the centralization of capital finds its most accomplished geographical expression in urban development' (Smith 1984: 136). In more recent years, that concern has heavily contributed to the discussion about 'the massive reconfigurations of state territorial organization,' resulting from neo-liberal globalization (Brenner 1997: 274). Within the geographic study of globalization, a slight shift has been made so that cities are now often pointed to as both the product of neo-liberal globalization and the producers of such globalization (Harvey

2000: 64; Sassen 2006; Massey 2007), with special attention given to those cities with a 'strategic, specialized role in the global economy' (Sassen 2006: 7). It is argued that in the era of neo-liberal globalization cities, rather than states, act as the 'command center' of the world economy (Grant & Nijman 2002: 321).

Neil Brenner's (1997) work, meanwhile, also attempts to recuperate the state as a producer of space. This is a theory of the state that both recognizes the 'effects of capitalist reconstruction on state form' while at the same time not assuming the 'nation-state's definitive crisis or obliteration' (ibid.: 274). Brenner draws on both Lefebvre and Harvey to argue that the state is still very much involved in the production of space, particularly in the reconfiguration of spatial scales, in order to secure what Harvey (1981) calls a 'spatial fix', which might temporarily 'permit the crisis-free, uninterrupted continuation' of capital accumulation (Brenner 1997: 277, 280). Taking to heart Lefebvre's (1991/1974) idea that social relations (e.g. the nation-state) produce space and are produced by space, Brenner also argues that the state 'is a product of a particular historical *geographical moment* of capitalist development' (Marston 2000: 225, emphasis added). In addition, Brenner's (1997, 2001) work on the state as a producer of spatial scales has contributed to a heated debate about the production of spatial scales in which Marston and Smith (2001: 617) have argued that 'due to a heavy emphasis on the state, capital and the politics emanating from the sphere of production, theorizations of scale have inadequately addressed the processes of social reproduction and consumption' in the production of scale, such as that which might be addressed through more significant consideration of the household and the body.

There is no question that each of these researchers is keen to recognize the role of everyday human practice, just as Lefebvre's theory of the production of space encouraged, whether

through the re-assertion of the spatial division of labor (Smith 1984; Marston 2000; Sassen 2006), acknowledgement of political resistance (Harvey 2000: 74), or reverence for the body's role in the production of space (Harvey 2000: 49, 130; Marston 2000; Marston & Smith 2001). Nonetheless, except in rare occasions (see for example, Garmany 2008), deep engagement with concrete human practices that produce space is lacking (Leitner & Miller 2007: 116). This is a bias towards the investigation of dominant social relations, characterized by Lefebvre's idea of 'conceived space', which results (often unintentionally) in the invisibilization of potential alternative modes of spatial production.

This thesis, in contrast, both highlights the research gap and suggests a possible way into the investigation of a progressive transformation of urban space. Through explicit engagement with lived space practices this thesis demonstrated the role that barrio inhabitants play in the production and transformation of urban space. This approach was further bolstered by integration of Lefebvre's (1996/1968) concept of the 'right to the city', which served as a theoretical reference point to extend the primary research question and ask, to *what extent* are the popular power strategies of the CTU movement transforming urban space in Caracas?

This leads to a second contribution made by this project. Urban social movement research often struggles to engage with the impact that movements have on their spatial environment. Notably, Manuel Castells's work *The City and the Grassroots* (1981) paved the way for new research on urban social movements, asserting that 'major innovations in the city's role, meaning, and structure tend to be the outcome of grassroots mobilization and demands; when these mobilizations result in the transformation of the urban structure, we call them urban social movements' (ibid.: xviii). However, for many who engaged with

Castells's work, his bar for 'transformation', which amounted to a change in 'urban meaning' from exchange value to use value (Lowe 1986: 34), was set so high that even Castells's own case studies failed to meet the criteria of 'urban social movement' (ibid.). Accordingly, subsequent research deemed urban transformation (by Castells's definition) that is initiated by urban popular movements as an almost-impossibility, given the large-scale problems, such as economic disparity, unemployment or lack of adequate housing, around which urban movements tend to organize themselves (Lowe 1986; Schuurman 1989).

The question of space and urban transformation (of some kind) as the object of urban movement activity has taken a backseat in academic research to questions about why and how movements organize (Álvarez & Escobar 1992). Some research (e.g. Motta 2009, 2011a, 2011b; Fernandez, S. 2007, 2010a, 2010b) is focused on the transformation of social relations and subjectivities within movements, that while valuable to changing how we think about politics and democracy, does not connect this transformation to the territorial objectives that urban movements often have. The nature of this project suggests that it is possible, and when talking about the urban dispossessed perhaps necessary, to bring together the experiential, the ideational and the material into a common analysis of movements and their cities.

As a result, this project is unique because it views the production of urban space from the perspective of urban inhabitants, examining the organized practices of barrio inhabitants to suggest that they do indeed have an impact on urban space. Not only that, but the thesis highlights the variety of ways in which barrio inhabitants can have a transformative impact on urban space, challenging the dominant forms of power relations that produce contemporary cities and the socio-spatial segregation within them.

Finally, on my third trip to Venezuela in 2010, I found myself having lunch with Ricardo, a resident of Petare in the Metropolitan Area of Caracas and an active participant in the CTU movement. As with many of my interviews I asked Ricardo how my research might contribute to the work of the movement. His answer surprised me.

Don't waste your time telling us about ourselves – we know our faults and our problems. What we need you to do is tell others about what is going on here, in the words that people you know would understand. You can't make a comparison, because there is none, but you can share ideas. After all, we're all just people [*el pueblo*], which means we're not that different. Venezuela is just a model... The US doesn't realize it, but the best thing they did was call Chávez an authoritarian, a dictator. Because that got people interested in what is going on here, people like you. They said, "what could be going on over there to make people say such things?" And they come and find out for themselves. Now, we can defend Chávez [from attack], but we need you to tell others about the people because Chávez may be the leader but we are the power [behind him] (Ricardo, CTU activist, Caracas, personal interview, 15 April 2010).

Ricardo's words highlight a final effort that this research makes, which is to contribute to the growing body of research that investigates the Venezuela that exists behind the figure of Chávez. While recognizing the role that state institutions have played in the promotion of popular organizations, as well as the important role that Chávez does in fact play in the Bolivarian Revolution, my work reveals another face of Venezuelan politics and social life that is rooted in the experience of everyday people and which is intent on producing power that

is both distinct from the state apparatus and explicitly rejects hierarchical relationships. Though the extent to which this power is able to be exerted is somewhat limited, it nonetheless suggests that another struggle is afoot in Venezuela.

## **THE POBLADORES MOVEMENT AND THE RIGHT TO THE CITY**

By the time I left Venezuela in the summer of 2010, the Bolivarian Revolution and the Urban Land Committee movement were at precarious moments in their histories. Venezuela was preparing itself for the National Assembly elections where it was widely known that the pro-Chávez legislators were going to lose seats (since the opposition had boycotted the previous election), but the question was, would they maintain the super-majority necessary to pass 'revolutionary' laws? Given the difficulty of passing such laws, even with 98% of the Assembly seats supposedly held by the pro-revolution side, the worry on the ground was that the opposition would halt, if not retract, legislation such as the Urban Land Regularization Law. Moreover, the 2010 elections were viewed as a preamble to the presidential election in 2012.

At the same time, there was an obvious sense of disillusionment and fatigue among pro-revolution activists, including many from the CTU movement. In most of the interviews that I conducted in 2010, activists would shift from excitement and alertness when discussing the early years of the revolution and the movement to a feeling of exhaustion and worry when addressing the present-day situation.<sup>2</sup> Many talked about the Bolivarian Revolution and the movement experiencing a period of '*retraso*' (slow-down or set-back) that required the 3 R's – '*revisión, rectificación y reimpulso*' (revision, correction, and renewed effort) – which

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<sup>2</sup> This emotional shift was less noticeable in previous years, though on occasion it did surface.



became a common refrain for revolution activists. This sentiment seemed to be driven by two factors: the failure of the state, on one hand, to radically change its structures and practices (e.g. corruption and bureaucracy are rampant and perceived to be debilitating to the success of the revolution), and on the other hand, the constant calls for mobilization and action by popular organizations, state institutions, and the president. As Ricardo told me, 'There's a demobilization of the popular movements. But it's not a demobilization in the sense that we are dropping our cause (*nuestra bandera*), just there's so much work and all of us are involved in so many things that it's very difficult for us to meet up' (CTU activist, Caracas, personal interview, 15 April 2010).

As was discussed in Chapter 6, frustration about the state's tendency to absorb and subordinate popular power initiatives and to institutionalize and bureaucratize them, thus stripping them of their transformative political potential, often takes center stage in debates between activists and in many of my interviews with them. The Community Councils seem to exemplify the tension between the possibility for popular organization and power to assert itself in the Bolivarian Revolution and the creep of the state into the role of 'facilitating' the creation of popular organizations. The concern is not that the state provides resources and stimuli to popular power, for as we saw in Chapter 5 with the School for Activists and as is evident by Decree 1666, these things have often been used to mobilize popular organizations without necessarily losing their independent political positions. The concern is around the power relations that are produced when state institutions take over the work of organizing, facilitating, and maintaining popular organizations, as is perceived to be the case with the Community Councils. This has created what Carlos called an 'orientation towards government', which detracts from the orientation towards autonomous political organization that began to emerge in the aftermath of the economic crisis of the 1980s and

the *caracazo* in 1989 (CTU activist, Lara State, personal interview, 10 April 2000).

This is significant at least in as much as popular organizations' 'right to participation' (decision-making power) and 'right to appropriation' (producing new space) (Lefebvre 1995/1968) are constrained by state institutions, thus limiting the transformation of urban space. The state's perversion of popular power initiatives that hope to produce the 'right to the city' was discussed in Chapter 6 in relation to *Plan Barrio Nuevo Tricolor*. '[State institutions] don't accept that we are politically autonomous. They don't accept that we can make decisions, while still being allies. They want an ally that is sheltered... that consults them to make decisions' (Ricardo, CTU activist, Caracas, personal interview, 15 April 2010).

Thus the desire to win the National Assembly elections in September 2010 existed in tension with the desire to throw out those who were deemed dangerous to popular power, including some who had been named by Chávez to run for election despite having lost the primary elections.<sup>3</sup> In the end, though the pro-revolution candidates won a majority of the Assembly, their retention of over 60 per cent of the seats fell short of the two-thirds necessary to pass legislation. In addition, the election involved a high abstention rate, signalling the disillusionment and uncertainty in the revolution going forward. As one activist put it, 'Well, the elections weren't lost but the objective wasn't completely achieved either, so we'll have to see what will happen with the new assembly. I also think that the politicians deserved what happened, for not working, for only wanting to win the election without having done their jobs...' (personal communications, 11 October 2010). Yet it is difficult to overstate how, despite these uncertainties and frustrations about the Chávez government,

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<sup>3</sup> The former Minister of Public Works and Housing, Diosdado Cabello, was one of these candidates who was widely disliked by popular activists and often accused of paying lip-service to popular power while passing policies that 'criminalize the barrios'. Nonetheless, Cabello was selected by Chávez to run for the Assembly. CTU activists reacted with chagrin and disbelief at Chávez's decision but also relief at the hope that a new minister might be more favorable to their interests.

popular movements, including the CTUs, are tied to a relationship of common cause with that same government, bound in resistance to global capitalism, a critique of US imperialism, and an aspiration for a future socialist society.

The activity leading up to the election, the work of trying to recuperate the Community Councils for the interests of popular power, and the paralysis with the state (exemplified by the four years it took to pass the Urban Land Regularization Reform Bill) also contributed to the *retraso* of the CTU movement. As of the summer of 2010 it was unclear what kind of future the movement could look forward to. As one activist said, 'The movement doesn't have the connections that it used to, for weakness in the movement, weaknesses in leadership, and weaknesses in the *el proceso* [the Bolivarian Revolution]' (Carlos, CTU activist, personal interview, 10 April 2010). Even for an observer like myself the strain of the political environment and internal tensions were difficult to watch.

Chapter 1 introduced the struggle that the movement was experiencing in the early part of 2010 as parts of the CTU movement, primarily from Caracas, moved towards greater articulation with other popular movements under the identity of the Pobladores Movement. I partly attribute these tensions to the movement's uneven geographies, on one hand, and the desire for greater articulation at wider scales and across social classes, on the other. Despite these tensions, in accordance with The Methodology and the practice of *encuentro*, the discussion about the Pobladores Movement continued for several months and included a proposal to hold dozens of local meetings to discuss how to move forward. The question was temporarily resolved, or at least put to the side, by the flooding crisis at the end of 2010, which galvanized the Venezuelan state to take action on the titling process, the reform bill and other CTU proposals, and has made the Pobladores Movement identity a strategic

choice for the CTU national movement.

As a result, the CTU movement has entered into a new phase of political organization and transformation of urban space. The beginnings of this phase, which started with a large meeting with President Chávez in January 2011, have pushed the Pobladores Movement to the center stage of grassroots popular power struggles in the country, where the movement's active participants have swelled in number, new articulations with other (non-urban-specific) movements are being forged, and new strategies for urban transformation are being developed. Victories are being claimed on the legislative front and the movement is working closely with state institutions to transform urban land into New Socialist Communities, in a way that is much more aggressive than was discussed in Chapter 6 (multiple personal communications with movement activists).

## **LOOKING FORWARD**

The new life that has been given the Pobladores Movement suggests, also, a further step towards the right to the city, a step that may be much more significant than had been achieved prior to January 2011. It appears that thinking in terms of the right to the city has become 'an organizational and mobilizing "linchpin"... [forming] an integrative umbrella for coalition building, and kind of connective tissue or "glue" that can help to *unite diverse and particularized struggles into larger and more powerful movements*' (Soja 2010: 109, quoting Purcell, emphasis in original). Yet the fact that this new phase of the movement's development has been in part stimulated by the Chávez government's response to the housing crisis should also provoke deeper consideration around how the right to the city might be achieved despite or because of intervention by the state.

Thus the transition of the CTU movement into the Pobladores Movement, along with President Chávez's comments in the epigraph of this chapter, suggest that a more extensive avenue of research that falls along the lines of this project is opening. Such research might continue to engage in the question about urban transformation, especially as Mike Davis (2006: 119) argues that in terms of socio-spatial segregation in the global South 'it is important to grasp that we are dealing with a fundamental reorganization of metropolitan space, *involving a drastic diminution of the intersections between the lives of the rich and the poor*, which transcends traditional social segregation and urban fragmentation.' In Venezuela, though, we are witnessing a different sort of struggle than that posited by Davis. In Caracas, with the concept of the right to the city guiding the way forward, the tide of deepening segregation is being confronted by efforts that are engaged in disrupting socio-spatial segregation, bringing barrio inhabitants into the city center and taking the city center (that is, the power to govern) to *los cerros*, the urban periphery. Though this has been touched on briefly at the end of Chapter 6, it is obvious that the Pobladores Movement is taking this struggle to a whole new level of collaboration and solidarity across social classes and multiple geographies that could lead to new strategies and new forms of the right to the city than have thus far been experienced.

As another prompt for future research, Brian Roberts (2005: 120) suggests that 'the lives of city dwellers in Latin America have become inextricably bound into a web of relations that are local, national and international.' While it is worth asking if there was ever a time when they were not inextricably bound in a multi-scalar web of relations, Roberts's reflection coincides with other research avenues that this project also points towards but that have not been able to be explored. In the epigraph of Chapter 6, Carlos pointed out the clear understanding that the movement has about the connections between the multiple scales at

which the struggle for over the city must be waged. 'Capitalism, as a system, is a worldwide system. That means it's not just localized. The strategy that the popular movement proposes is that even when we are in a local struggle, we shouldn't lose view of the continental or the global...' (CTU activist, Lara State, personal interview, 10 April 2010). To be sure, the movement is already active at the international scale. Having experience with the movement as it attempts to articulate with other popular organizations beyond the borders of Venezuela, it might very well be that this is the most interesting work that the movement is undertaking and certainly deserves to be explored further.

Finally, this project has taken a view of the Venezuelan state from the perspective of CTU struggles, reflecting Trouillot's (2003: 91) suggestion that 'by focusing on *state effects through the lived experience of subjects*, we can build an ethnography of the state up from the ground.' While not intending here to build an ethnography of the state, such a ground-up view has given a different inflection to the state than is often encountered. I propose that in the complex environment of the Bolivarian Revolution and the strong and divergent political responses to the role of the state in the revolution, it is worthwhile to pay attention to the effects of the state so as to navigate a path through the power relations that the state exerts. This, I would suggest, is a way of also contributing to movement-relevant research of the kind that I discussed in Chapter 1.

On that note, going back to the methodological argument that movement-relevant research requires constant dialogue at all phases of research, it is my hope that the written product of this project serve not as the end of dialogue but as a launch pad from which dialogue can begin anew, either with the Pobladores Movement or with other movements and popular organizations that can benefit from the analysis presented here.

# Appendix A

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## INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The following is a list of those people that I engaged in a formal, semi-structured interview between June 2008 and June 2010. In some cases, multiple interviews with the same person were conducted. Interviews 1-14 involved people who held a government post, were professors, or were otherwise not activists in the Urban Land Committee (CTU) movement. These interviews were focused on the broader history of Venezuelan popular practices, the current Bolivarian Revolution, the relationship between the state and popular movements, and/or an assessment of the CTU movement. The subsequent listed interviews were with CTU and Pobladores Movement activists whose principle place of activity ranged from highly local within the barrio to mostly at the national and international scale, or a combination of both. While each of these interviews included common areas of enquiry (e.g. personal experience of activism, their initial involvement in a CTU, and their analysis of the CTU's impact on their barrio or city), each interview also explored questions that suited the particular positionality of each activist (e.g. as founder of the movement, key facilitator of The Methodology, or employee in Fundacaracas). All barrio activists have been given pseudonyms. Of course, many additional, spontaneous conversations which took place on long bus rides and on the sidelines of meetings are not included here.

1. Carolys Perez – Director of the OTN; former Director of Plan Barrio Nuevo Tricolor – 20 May 2010
2. Elizabeth de Abreu – Geographer, OTN – 22 April 2009
3. Francisco Barrios – former Geographer, OTN – 19 April 2009
4. Zulma Betancourt – Legal Aid, OTN and Libertador Land Registry Office, Caracas – 15 May 2009 and 19 May 2009
5. Ana Maria Alarcón – former Director, Libertador Land Registry Office, Caracas – 19 May 2009

6. Edgar Silva – former Director, Libertador Land Registry Office, Caracas – 26 May 2010
7. Marcelo Carrasco – Legal Historian, Libertador Land Registry Office, Caracas; Professor, Central University of Venezuela – 12 May 2009
8. Julio Valdes – Vice Rector, University of Simón Rodríguez – 30 April 2009
9. Adrián Padilla – Director, Centro de Experimentación para el Aprendizaje Permanente, University of Simón Rodríguez – 27 June 2008
10. Alejandrina Reyes – Facilitator, Centro de Experimentación para el Aprendizaje Permanente, University of Simón Rodríguez – 8 July 2008
11. Michael Lebowitz – Director, Centro Internacional Miranda, Caracas – 8 May 2009
12. Nelson Freitez – Professor, Universidad Centroccidental Lisandro Alvarado, Lara State – 5 May 2009
13. Gregorio – Community Council Activist, Caracas – 22 April 2009 and 29 April 2009
14. Luis – Sin Techo Movement Activist, Caracas – 1 June 2010
15. Ana – Pobladores Movement Activist, Caracas; former Outreach Coordinator, Libertador Land Registry Office – 27 May 2010
16. Gerardo – Pobladores Movement Activist, Caracas; Outreach Coordinator, Fundacaracas – 6 May 2010
17. Paula – Pioneer Activist, Caracas; Training Team member, National CTU Movement; Outreach Coordinator, Fundacaracas – 28 May 2010
18. Ricardo – CTU Activist, Caracas; Training Team member, National CTU Movement; Outreach Worker, Fundacaracas – 15 April 2010
19. Silvia – CTU Activist, Caracas; former Training Team member, National CTU Movement; Outreach Worker, Fundacaracas – 3 July 2008
20. Marco – CTU Activist, Caracas; Outreach Worker, Fundacaracas – 13 July 2009, 17 May 2010, 1 June 2010
21. Fernando – CTU Activist, Caracas; former Outreach Worker, Fundacaracas – 24 May 2010
22. Sonia – CTU Activist, Caracas; Outreach Worker, OTN – 11 May 2009
23. Juana – CTU Activist, Caracas; Training Team member, National CTU Movement; Outreach Worker, OTN – 26 April 2010
24. Rosa – CTU Activist, Caracas; Training Team member, National CTU Movement – 9 May 2010
25. Maria – CTU Activist, Caracas; Training Team member, National CTU Movement – 14 May 2010
26. Cristóbal – CTU Activist, Caracas; Training Team member, National CTU Movement – 9 May 2009, 13 July 2009, 28 April 2010, 6 June 2010
27. Marcelo – CTU Activist, Anzoátegui State; Training Team member, National CTU Movement – 29 May 2010
28. Pedro – CTU Activist, Caracas; former Asamblea de Barrios Activist – 18 May 2010
29. Enrique – CTU Activist, Altos Mirandinos; Engineer, Community Cooperative – 20 May 2009



30. Carlos – CTU Activist, Lara State – 10 April 2010
31. Francesca – CTU Activist, Caracas – 20 May 2010
32. Suzana – CTU Activist, Caracas – 18 May 2010
33. Ingrid – CTU Activist, Altos Mirandinos – 12 July 2009, 22 July 2009
34. Sofia – CTU Activist, Aragua State – 19 May 2010
35. Group Interview: Marcus, Graciela, Victor – CTU Activists, Bolívar State; Training Team members, National CTU Movement – 31 May 2010

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